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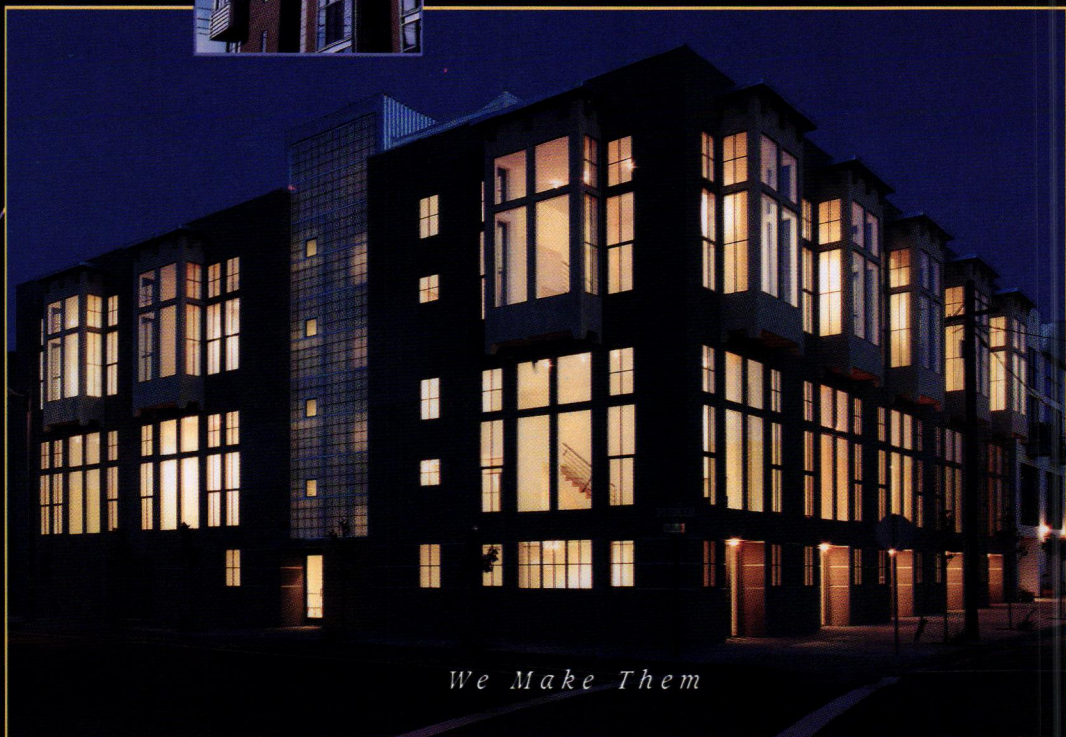
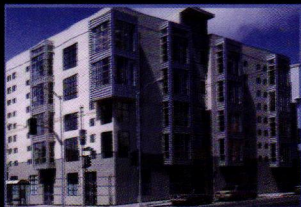
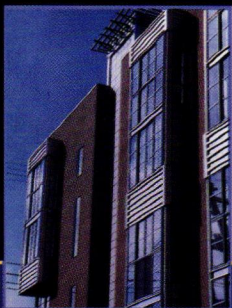
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Comment

Learning From SFO

Our first big treat as editor of **arcCA** (a position that so startles us that we find ourselves referring to ourselves in the plural) was to attend a press reception at the new International Terminal at San Francisco International Airport. It is a beautiful building—clear, elegant, exquisitely constructed.

As we strolled, a colleague remarked that he is intrigued by parallels between the structure of architects' practices and the forms of their buildings. In the case of the IT, one such parallel is striking: this simple, understandable-at-a-glance space was designed by three architectural firms (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Michael Willis Architects and Del Campo & Maru) who collaborated not from separate offices, but instead by sharing a single, understandable-at-a-glance space. No doubt other factors abetted the success of the collaboration—for example, the three firms formed teams for various tasks by pooling their talents without regard for firm affiliation—but we are gratified to note the impact of space on the formation of a design team.

The strategy has worked before. As Environmental Design Manager for the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, David Meckel, FAIA (and AIACC's V.P. of Communications), convinced the Olympic Committee to rent a 60,000 square foot warehouse space, then required all the firms designing buildings for the Games to set up project offices there. At the end of each day, all the work went up on the walls. As Meckel explains, L.A. is not Munich, so a method other than top-down control was needed to prompt consistent design quality.

Sometimes it is good to put everybody or everything in one room; other times it's not. Those of us who frequent SFO are united in our admiration for its remarkable exhibitions program, a museum not defined by walls, but dispersed throughout the airport. We asked Cura-

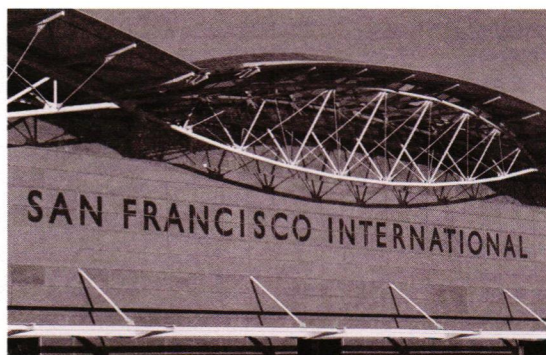
tor-in-Charge John Hill if he could compare the scale of the SFO program with those of conventional museums. Allowing that the numbers are impossible to confirm, he was nevertheless willing to estimate: 42 million passengers/year plus two to three greeters per passenger: say, conservatively, 120 million visitors per year (including 30,000 airport employees). If you figure that one person in ten pays attention to an exhibit, you have an "attendance" at SFO second, nationally, only to the Air and Space Museum.

We are accordingly unconvinced of the "crisis in public space," and retain some faith that the disposition of spaces, their consolidation or diffusion—or, to put it plainly, where we put walls and where we don't—still makes a difference in public experience.

Two other reasons to say "we": first, Therese Bissell, the outgoing editor of **arcCA**, whom I am privileged to succeed, lent a helpful hand in editing the articles for this issue. Thank you, Terry. Second, **arcCA** is blessed with a frisky and acute editorial board (check out the masthead, facing page), who collectively shape its content.

We hope you enjoy "Common Ground."●

Tim Culvahouse, editor



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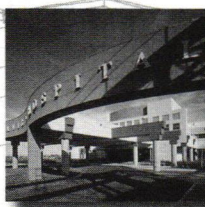
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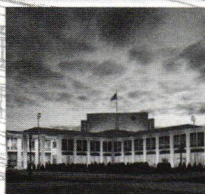
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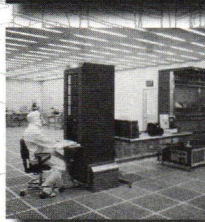
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Aaron Betsky is Curator of Architecture, Design and Digital Projects, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Editor-at-Large, *Architecture* magazine; and a frequent lecturer, teacher and author, most recently of *Architecture Must Burn*.

Larry Dodge, a sole practitioner in Piedmont, California, is an urban designer and architect who has worked on projects in sixteen countries.

Wade Gordon is an abstract painter living the life of his dreams in San Francisco with his lover. He wishes to offer "profound thanks to Dave Bine and Tom Howard for their participation in the creation of this piece, without which it would look very different."

Robert S. Harris, FAIA, is a professor and urban design consultant. He directs the University of Southern California graduate programs in architecture, was dean of the schools of architecture at USC and the University of Oregon, and has been named a distinguished professor by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture. In Los Angeles, he has chaired the Mayor's Urban Design Advisory Panel and the Downtown Strategic Plan Advisory Committee.

Laura Lawson is an assistant professor in the School of Landscape Architecture at Louisiana State University. She received her PhD in Environmental Planning from the University of California at Berkeley. Her research explores how the landscape can be a resource for community empowerment through process and design.

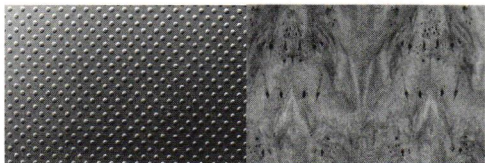
Jane Martin is principal of Shift Design Studio in San Francisco and a member of the architecture faculty at California College of Arts and Crafts. She has been a citizen of Black Rock City since 1995. She was a Danger Ranger at this year's festival.

The late **Charles Moore** was a founding partner of Moore Lyndon Turnbull and Whitaker in San Francisco, Moore Grover Harper (now Centerbrook Architects) in Connecticut, Moore Ruble Yudell in Los Angeles and, in Austin, Texas, Moore/Andersson. He served as chair of architecture at UC Berkeley, dean at Yale and chair at UCLA, where he formed the Urban Innovations Group. He held the O'Neil Ford Centennial Chair at the University of Texas at Austin from 1984 until his death in 1993. Moore received the 1989 AIA/ACSA Topaz Medalion for lifetime achievement in architectural education and the 1991 AIA Gold Medal. He was a prolific writer; his books include *Dimensions: Space, Shape & Scale in Architecture* (with Gerald Allen), *The Place of Houses* (with Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon, FAIA) and *Chambers for a Memory Palace* (with Donlyn Lyndon). *You Have to Pay for the Public Life*, a selection of Moore's essays edited by Kevin P. Keim, is forthcoming from MIT Press.

D. J. Waldie lives in Lakewood, California, where he is a city official. He received the 1996 California Book Award for nonfiction, the 1998 Whiting Writers Award and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the California Arts Council. *Holy Land* is published by W. W. Norton.

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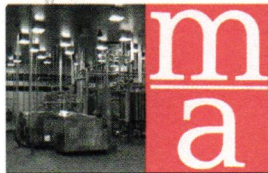
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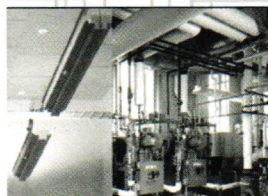
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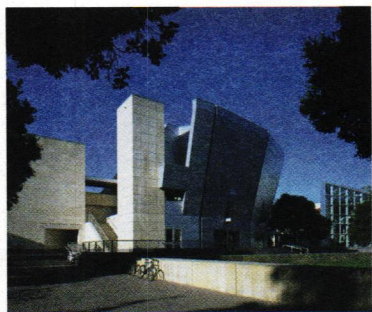
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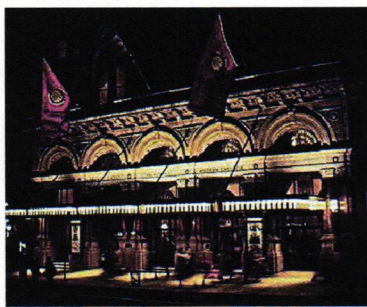


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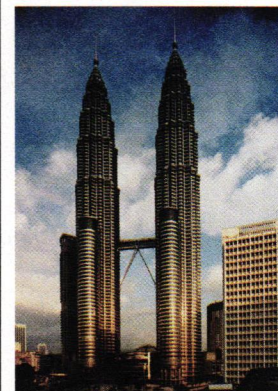
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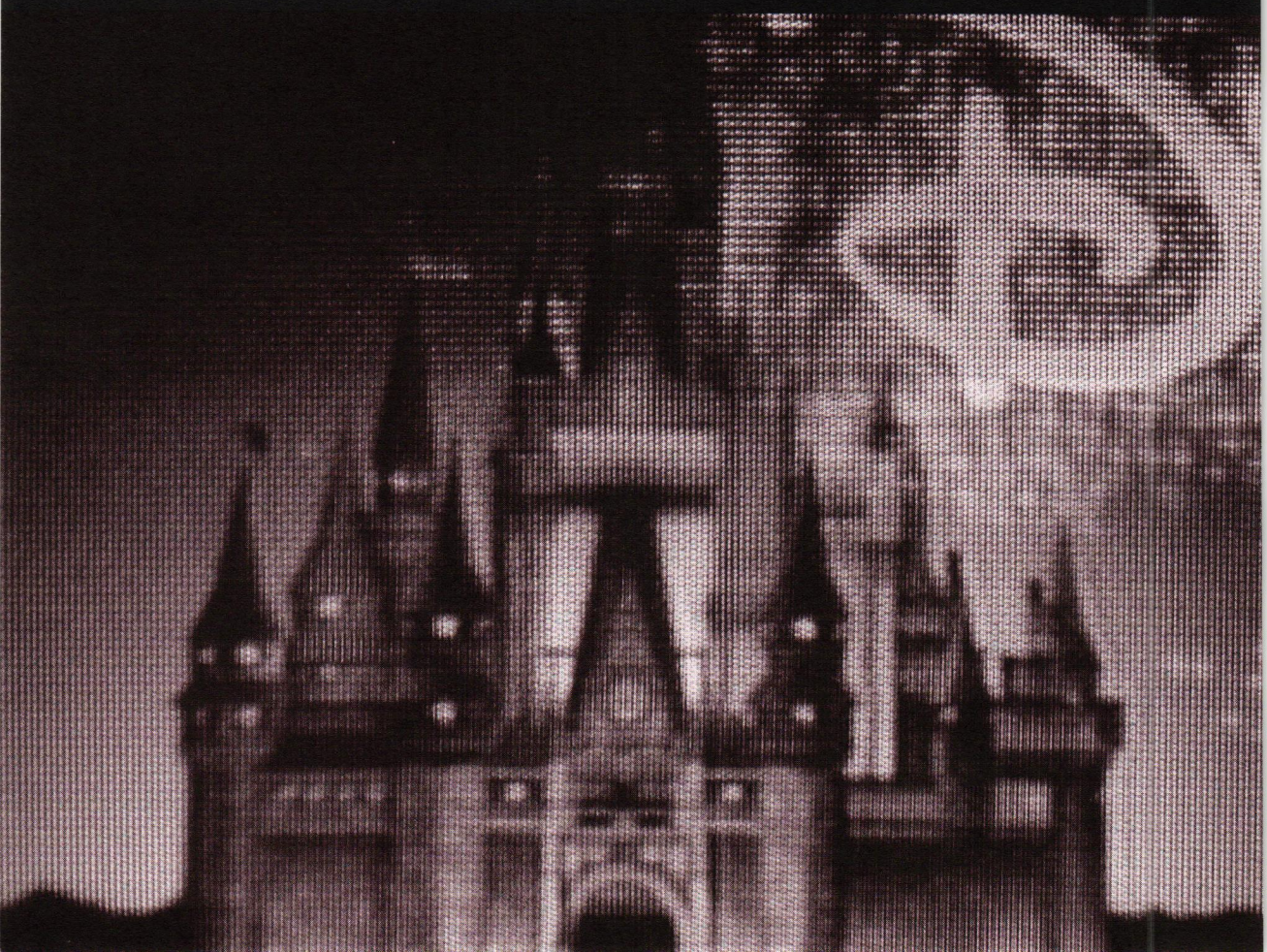
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You Have to Pay



for the Public Life

Charles Moore

It is interesting, if not useful, to consider where one would go in Los Angeles to have an effective revolution of the Latin American sort: presumably, that place would be the heart of the city. If one took over some public square, some urban open space in Los Angeles, who would know? A march on City Hall would be equally inconclusive. The heart of the city would have to be sought elsewhere. The only hope would seem to be to take over the freeways, or to emplane for New York to organize sedition on Madison Avenue; word would quickly enough get back.

With "You Have to Pay for the Public Life," written in 1964 (fully eight years before Venturi, Scott Brown & Izenour's *Learning from Las Vegas*), Charles Moore brought to the emerging critique of the Modern Movement a joyful appreciation of historic and vernacular building forms, a generous appraisal of popular culture and an imaginative optimism regarding our ability to turn even the most recalcitrant of our inventions (like freeways) into beautiful and nourishing elements of culture. His observations continue to challenge us thirty-five years later.—Editor

The process of achieving an urban focus is the same as that of achieving monumentality: it starts with the selection, by some inhabitants, of a place which is to be of particular importance, and continues when they invest that place with attributes of importance, such as edges or some kind of marker. This process, the establishing of cities and the marking of important places, constitutes most of the physical part of establishing civilization. Charles Eames has made the point that the crux of this civilizing process is the giving up by individuals of something in order that the public realm may be enhanced. In the city, say, urban and monumental places, indeed urbanity and monumentality themselves, can occur only when something is given over by people to the public.

✱ The most evident thing about Los Angeles, especially, and the other new cities of the West is that in the terms

of any of the traditions we have inherited, hardly anybody gives anything to the public realm. Instead, it is not at all clear what the public realm consists of, or even, for the time being, who needs it.

✱ Even in the few years of Yankee California's existence, this kind of placelessness has not always been characteristic. During the '20's and into the '30's, with what was doubtless an enormous assist from the Hollywood vision in the days of its greatest splendor, an architectural image of California developed which was exotic but specific, derivative but exhilaratingly free. It had something to do with Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, with the benign climate, with the splendor of the sites and their floral luxuriance, with the general availability of wood and stucco, and with the assurance supplied by Hollywood that appearances did matter, along with the assumption (for which Hollywood was not necessary but to which it gave a boost) that we, the inheritors of a hundred traditions, had our pick. What came of this was an architecture that owed something to Spain, very little to the people who were introducing the International Style, and a great deal to the movie camera's moving eye. It seemed perfectly appropriate to the energetic citizens of Santa Barbara, for instance, that after their city had been devastated by an earthquake, it should rise again Spanish. The railroad round house appeared

to become a bullring, the movie house a castle. Everywhere in the town, the act of recalling another quite imaginary civilization created a new and powerful public realm.

✱ More recent years have their monuments as well. Indeed, by almost any conceivable method of evaluation that does not exclude the public, Disneyland must be regarded as the most important single piece of construction in the West in the past several decades. The assumption inevitably made by people who have not yet been there—that it is some sort of physical extension of Mickey Mouse—is wildly inaccurate. Instead, singlehanded, it is engaged in replacing many of those elements of the public realm which have vanished in the featureless private floating world of southern California, whose only edge is the ocean and whose center is otherwise undiscoverable (unless by our revolution test it turns out to be on Manhattan Island). Curiously, for a public place, Disneyland is not free. You buy tickets at the gate. But then, Versailles cost someone a great deal of money, too. Now, as then, you have to pay for the public life.

Disneyland, it appears, is enormously important and successful just because it recreates all the chances to respond to a public environment, which Los Angeles particularly does not any longer have. It allows play-acting, both to be watched and to be participated in, in a public sphere. In as unlikely a place as could be conceived, just off the Santa Ana Freeway, a little over an hour from the Los Angeles City Hall, in an unchartable sea of suburbia, Disney has created a place, indeed a whole public world, full of sequential occurrences, of big and little drama, full of hierarchies of importance and excitement, with opportunities to respond at the speed of rocketing bobsleds (or rocketing rockets, for all that) or of horse-drawn street cars. An American Main Street of about 1910 is the principal theme, against which play fairy-tale fantasies, frontier adventure situations, jungles, and the world of tomorrow. And all this diversity, with unerring sensitivity, is keyed to the kind of participation without embarrassment which apparently at this point in our history we crave.

✱ California and the West now face an architectural crisis different in many ways from the problems of the rest of the country. The Boston architects of the nineteenth-century railroad tycoon Leland Stanford had their own clear notions, social and architectural, of the nature of hierarchy, and they manifested them with great success in the old Stanford campus. But twentieth-century California has been equalitarian. As its population grows phenomenally, the people who comprise it, rich and poor, come from all sorts of places and owe no allegiance to any establishment of the sort that exercises at least some control of money and taste in areas less burgeoning.

While California was largely rural, this equalitarianism lent special delights to living here. In southern California, from a combination of white-walled story-book Spanish and white-walled International Style, there developed, through Gill and Schindler and Neutra and *Arts and Architecture* magazine, and thanks to the climate and the landscape, a way of building large numbers of private houses of a charm and comfort never before possible anywhere on such a scale. This development was surpassed only in northern California, where, if the climate was a bit moodier, the views of bays and forests were better, and there were architects, first of the generation of Bernard Maybeck, then of the generation of William Wurster, Gardner Dailey, and Hervey Parke Clark, who were willing and eminently able to make the most of the opportunities, to develop a domestic architecture not only esteemed by architects but almost universally accepted and enjoyed by the people for whom it was made.

✱ When California was rural, a golden never-never land with plenty of room, with open fields for the public realm, with magnificent scenery for a sharable image, and with Hollywood's grandiose offerings for a publicly sharable experience, nothing could have been more natural than this emphasis on provision for domestic life, nothing more understandable than the gradual atrophying of concern for a public realm that people go to and use. The public weal was being extensively considered in projects built hundreds of miles from Los Angeles and San Francisco to provide those cities with water and electric power; but the kind of monumentality that occurs when the Establishment requires buildings more important than other buildings, in places of special importance, when skilled architects give physical form to this requirement, and when human use and the public imagination confirm this importance, never occurred. It never occurred because the Establishment didn't exist, and because there was no need for it. California during the first four decades of the twentieth century was being developed mostly at a domestic scale, and very well, too; it seemed quite proper that man's impact on the land should be of this cozy, equalitarian and very pleasant sort.

The process, however, is continuing in 1964, and by now it brings worry. The domestic arrangements of the earlier decades are being reproduced endlessly, no longer in the places that laid some claim to public attention—places like Bel Air, Berkeley, and Sausalito for the view; San Francisco and San Diego for the bay; Hollywood for a very special activity; and Santa Barbara for high mountains coming close to the sea—but in the no-places in between, such as Hayward, Daly City, Inglewood, Manchester, and other municipal fictions even less memorable. The character and the sense of special place that came to the first communities for free, from the oak trees

around them and the yellow hills and the mountains and the sea, do not similarly serve the later comers or anyone: the oak trees go and the yellow hills vanish, the smaller mountains are flattened and even portions of the sea are filled in, all to be covered in a most equalitarian way with endless houses. Even the movie studios are being covered up.

It occurs to some, as the gray domestic waves of suburban sea fill in the valleys and the bays, and lap at and erode the hills, that something should be done, and that the something should be urban and monumental. The Bay Region Style, for all its domestic triumphs, offers no architectural framework for making a special celebration; the characteristic Wurster reticence, which has served so well in helping to create the continuous domestic fabric of the Bay cities, is too deeply ingrained to allow that. In southern California a latter-day straightforwardness born mostly of a habit of commercial expediency militates against architectural celebration of a particular place. But even more basic than the absence of a viable architectural idiom for making public centers is the absence of any Establishment ready to shoulder the responsibility for, to take a proprietary interest in, the public realm. So what, as we started out by asking, might we have instead, for an architectural framework and for an opportunity?

The hope exists that the first best chance for differentiation in these floating gray suburbs will come from our developing an interest in and techniques for a much more accurate definition than we seek presently of what the problems really are . . . We should be able to expect that our developing industrial plant, controlled by electronic devices of incredible sensitivity and complexity, should be able to give us a much wider, rather than a more restricted, range of products. Just so we might expect, as architects, that by using the techniques available to us, from computer and operations research methods to our own underused analytical capacities, in order to discover more accurately and completely than we do now the particularities, even the peculiarities, of the problems we are assigned, we might achieve a much wider, fuller, more differentiated and specific range of solutions than we do now. We should, then, at least have a method.

✱ For the opportunity, the actual commission to create a public realm, we must look to other sources than the Establishment of other times or other places, to people or institutions interested at once in public activity and in place. We depend, in part, on more Disneys, on men willing to submerge their own Mickey Mouse visions in a broader vision of greater public interest, and who are nonetheless willing and able to focus their attention on a particular problem and a particular place. Disneyland, however arbitrary its location, is

unique, even as Los Angeles is, and much of its power over the imagination comes from the fact.

✱ The cities of California . . . urgently need attention, before the characteristics that distinguish them at all are obliterated. There is no need and no time to wait for a not-yet-existent Establishment to build us the traditional kind of monuments or for a disaster gripping enough to wake the public conscience to the vanishing Places of the public realm we got for free. Most effectively, we might, as architects, first seek to develop a vocabulary of forms responsive to the marvelously complex and varied functions of our society, instead of continuing to impose the vague generalizations with which we presently add to the grayness of the suburban sea. Then, we might start sorting out for our special attention those things for which the public has to pay, from which we might derive the public life. These things would not be the city halls and equestrian statues of another place and time, but had better be something far bigger and better, and of far more public use. They might, for instance, be freeways: freeways are not for individual people, like living rooms are and like confused planners would have you believe the whole city ought to be; they are for the public use, a part of the public realm; and if the fidgety structures beside them and the deserts for parking—or for nothing—under them don't yet make sense, it is surely because there has so far been too little provision for and contribution to and understanding of the public realm, not too much. The freeways could be the real monuments of the future, the places set aside for special celebration by people able to experience space and light and motion and relationships to other people and things at a speed that so far only this century has allowed. Here are structures big enough and strong enough, once they are regarded as a part of the city, to re-excite the public imagination about the city. This is no shame to be covered by suburban bushes or quarantined behind cyclone fences. It is the marker for a place set in motion, transforming itself to another place. The exciting prospects, not surprisingly, show up best at Disneyland. There, on the inside of the Matterhorn from the aerial tramway over the bobsled run on the inside of the plastic mountain, is a vision of a place marked out for the public life, of a kind of rocketing monumentality, more dynamic, bigger, and, who knows? even more useful to people and the public than any the world has seen yet. ●

This excerpt from "You Have to Pay for the Public Life," originally published in Perspecta (The Yale Architecture Journal), nos. 9/10, 1965, is reprinted by permission of the publisher.



School It's all Virtue?

Aaron Betsky

Even with the recent stock fluctuations, Silicon Valley remains the site of the largest creation of wealth in the history of mankind. The question now is: what is all that money going to look like? In the past, wealth brought us the exaltation of cathedrals, the grandeur of palaces and the gritty monumentality of factories. What will be the monuments of Silicon Valley? Nobody yet knows, but a few architects and planners are making some suggestions. Along the way, they are building the first pieces of what may be a new aesthetic, rooted in science and technology, but as fragmented and provisional as our culture.

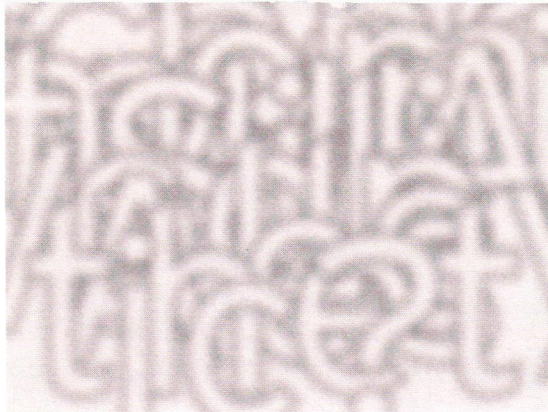
These fragmented buildings surround, and are penetrated by, threads of communal landscape. The prominence of shared outdoor spaces is a theme that runs through the best Silicon Valley buildings. It may have started on the campus of Stanford University, the mothership from which many of the Valley's high-tech companies were launched. The red-tiled roofs and arcaded forms of that campus, designed a hundred years ago by the Boston firm of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge in collaboration with landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, have become the *lingua franca* of the Valley. They have

been draped over tilt-up buildings and homes everywhere. Yet, as Stanford University Architect David Neuman, FAIA, points out, "the spaces in between the buildings are at least as important." Neuman has renovated those spaces on his campus and has become a great advocate for making outdoor spaces where people can gather, learn and just run into each other. "Technology demands of buildings that they remain flexible," he says. "That means that you cannot do that much with them. The outside stays. That's where you should look for building a sense of community."

TWO CAMPUS LANDSCAPES

A good example is the campus of Silicon Graphics (SGI), a leader in hardware and software for high-end graphic design. "We are in the visualization business," says SGI vice president Ray Johnson, "so it's important for us to have good architecture."

In SGI's Entry Site Project and the more recent Amphitheater Technology Center, both designed by Charles Dilworth, FAIA, Erik Sueberkrop, FAIA, and David Sabalvaro, AIA, of studios Architecture, fragments point to a larger whole. Here is a



collage of forms that could have come out of a computer but that also reflect the continually changing nature of a human landscape where electronic technology demands flexibility.

The 500,000 square foot Amphitheater Technology Center sits on top of an artificial hill that contains underground parking, a rarity in an area where seas of cars surrounding low-slung, spread out buildings are the norm. The U-shaped structure looks out over a five-acre park the company deeded to the city, and its playful forms, designed by landscape architect Dan Tuttle of SWA, continue into the complex to make areas where employees can play volleyball, eat lunch or just wander.

The Technology Center resembles a fragmented version of Thomas Jefferson's Lawn at the University of Virginia. In both cases, a series of pavilions stretches out on either side of an open space, surveying the land below. At Virginia, the head of the campus is a domed library. At the Technology Center, where hierarchies are definitely not part of the culture, the end piece is just another three-story office building. The places of gathering and learning are lecture halls, demonstration rooms and theaters that stick out of the rows of office buildings into the central space. Instead of a central monument to meaning, this complex has fragments for brainstorming.

More typical of new corporate campuses is that of Electronic Arts. Designed by Craig Hartman, FAIA, of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, it sits near what the local wags call "Oracle Castle," the glass-encased mid-rise buildings that house the Oracle Corporation, and "Sun Quentin," a massive and rather forbidding compound of low buildings that is the home of Sun Microsystems. Electronic Arts, on the other hand, is an open and almost humble essay in simple, elegant structures. The first phase of the plan, recently completed, has three buildings. One is a parking garage, in front of which Hartman placed a gymnasium and cafeteria. As elsewhere in Silicon

Valley, Electronic Arts is competing for engineers with such amenities, and they often become the architect's only chance to distinguish the buildings.

Beyond the refined skins and scale of the Electronic Arts complex—a legacy of SOM's long experience in making elegant office buildings—what sets the complex apart is the beauty of its shared open spaces. Like SGI's Amphitheater Technology Center, it was designed as an extension of the surrounding landscape. Here, that means that the architects took a reclaimed salt marsh and turned it into lively strips of green, planted and paved areas. The rich pattern on the ground does not become a monumental focal point, but encourages wandering through a fragmentation of the grids that mark the surrounding façades.

RIVER AND PASEO

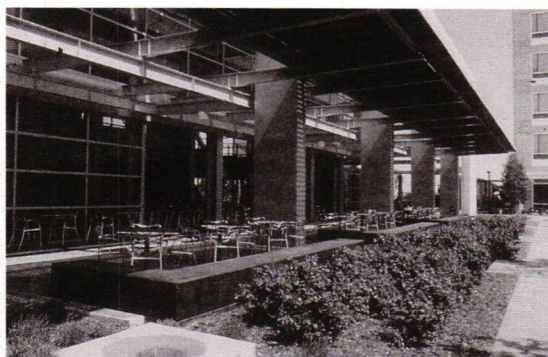
The sense of outdoor space as essential for gathering people together pervades Silicon Valley. San Jose, the largest town in the Valley, has grabbed onto the only natural feature that distinguishes it from the sprawl all around it—the Guadalupe River—to make it into a civic space linking a convention center, a children's museum, a hockey arena, the headquarters of industry giant Adobe and, eventually, the airport that serves as the gateway to the whole Valley. Designed by landscape architects Hargreaves Associates of San Francisco, the Guadalupe River Park has been under development since 1988, and half of its full four-mile stretch is now complete.

Hargreaves Associates have underscored the sinuous nature of the river with earthen tiers of snaking mounds that terrace up each bank. They become amphitheaters, pathways and places to rest, as well as embankments that hold the water back. The park also serves to funnel crowds to and from the arena and the convention center. At strategic points, bridges and plazas mark the intersection between the river and the grid of the city. This is design as a form of natural archaeology that seeks to find the nature of a nature that we usually just build on top of.

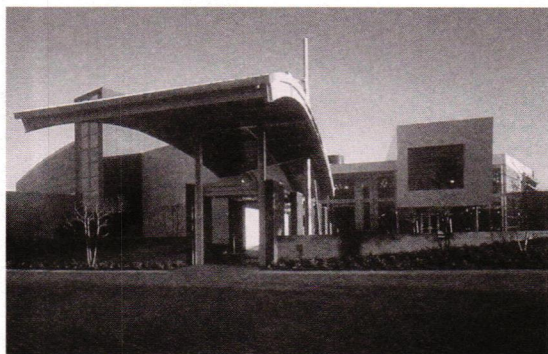
San Jose's and the Valley's most remarkable civic monument is the San Jose Repertory Theater, designed by Holt Hinshaw Architects of San Francisco and completed in 1997. The result of a decade-long fundraising project, its construction marked the arrival on the cultural scene of the



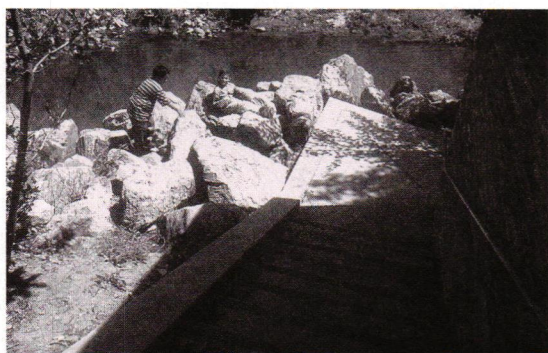
San Jose Repertory Theater



Electronic Arts



SGI Entry Site



Guadalupe River Park

Hewlett and Packard families, whose vast foundations were among the first to translate digital dough into do-good funding, and who each gave multi-million dollar donations to make the building possible.

The Theater is quite small—a conscious choice, according to its artistic director, Timothy Near. “This has become a place of community, where people see each other. It is our village square.” The Theater sits at the edge of a diagonal *paseo* or passageway that the city planners cut through the Anglo rigidity of San Jose’s grid and decorated with the words of Mexican poets. Instead of trying to imitate the Mexican forms that this gesture implies, Holt Hinshaw confronted its meander with an angular metallic rock that rises up and over the *paseo*. Its bravura gesture of destabilization is only proper in a world of technology that has moved away from the old sureties of humanist logic.

SHARDS, BLOBS AND MONUMENTS

The fragmented lofts of SGI lording over the swamps, the curve of the Guadalupe River tying together an anonymous landscape and the condensed spectacle of the San Jose Repertory Theater—all seem like good places to watch the immense wealth of Silicon Valley come together. Much of that money is fleeing to castles and haciendas hiding in the hills, where armies of craftsmen are hard at work building anything from Japanese tea pavilions for Larry Ellison, chairman of Oracle, to French chateaux for his minions. In the public realm, however, where we can see the results of all that electronic magic and the paper wealth it produces, we are beginning to see forms we haven’t known before. They are shards, prows and fragments, curves and curlicues and collages. They sum up the current state of the art in thinking about architecture, which borrows from physics and biology to tell us that our search for rational forms is a futile retreat into an old fashioned way of defining human construction. Building on chaos theory and on the programs produced by companies such as SGI, designers are proposing—and now building—“blobs” and “self-organizing systems” that may be as strange and as expressive of the power of invention as the Empire State, Chrysler and Rockefeller Center Buildings were almost fifty years ago. Surrounding and surrounded by these novel forms are what may finally be the true monuments of Silicon Valley: its redwoods, its Bay and its fragments of open space. ●



The park makes use
of environmental opportunities,
both natural factors
(topography)
and human interventions
(street grid and development pattern)

The Street as Avenue For Community Expression:

Courtland Avenue and Courtland Creek Park

Laura Lawson

The park employs the medium
of landscape
in simple but innovative ways
to reveal the true essence
of the site's past,
present and future

Driving west down Oakland's High Street on a fall afternoon—with the setting sun blinding you as you weave between cars turning left and cars parked on the right—can be a stressful experience. Pinned at both ends by congested Bay Area freeways, High Street is too narrow for the speed that drivers insist on when they strategically shift from one freeway to the other to avoid traffic. One of the left turns is to Courtland Avenue. Here, the drop in elevation and a row of purple-leaf plum trees announce a space qualitatively different from the hectic world you just escaped.

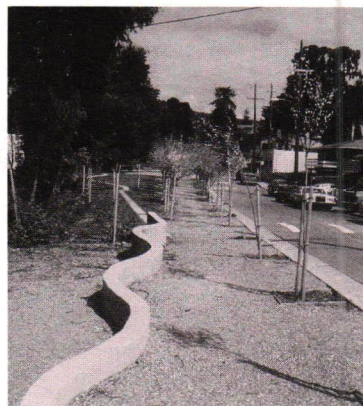
Ten years ago, when I first visited this neighborhood, I would have driven past that turn without registering the slightest interest. A five-block swath of vacant land was all that remained of the Courtland Avenue streetcar line that used to carry workers from downtown Oakland or the San Francisco ferry to their homes in East Oakland. That line was abandoned about thirty years ago, and over time the right-of-way acquired its own character as a place to repair cars, hang out, secretly dump garbage or even grow a vegetable garden. Some sections of the right-of-way provide access to modest homes, but in other areas Courtland Creek, running parallel to the right-of-way,

reveals an untamed urban wilderness of exotic and native plants within its deeply incised channel.

When the idea of transforming the right-of-way into a park started to be discussed in 1990, many people—neighbors, designers, city officials and others—envisioned primarily a visual improvement to the neighborhood. The park, however, does more than replace dirt with grass. It claims a piece of the public domain as a community resource that expresses its locality and begins to address some of the unmet environmental, recreational and social needs of the local residents. The park enhances the life of the community, both through the social interaction essential to its creation—the seven-year process of design and implementation brought together neighbors, city officials and activists—and through the physical provision of space.

The project was not without impediments. An existing recreational facility across High Street, even though it is difficult to reach on account of traffic, could have discouraged city officials and neighbors from creating a new park on the vacant land. Logistical factors such as sections in private ownership and access requirements might have impeded the project as well. Furthermore, community conditions did not assure its success even if built. The neighborhood was caught up in many of the problems that low-income communities face. Advocates had to address their own concerns that, by creating a park to enhance positive uses, they might also facilitate existing negative uses like drug sales and loitering.

Opportunities arose, though, that made the venture successful. The presence of a creek along the corridor captured the attention of a non-profit advocacy group, which then received grant funding to restore sections of the creek. In turn, this group secured the imagination and resources of Walter Hood, now chair of landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley. Through a community design studio, he and his students collected historical information, conducted interviews, held workshops, led exploratory walks and developed a master plan for the site. His firm, Hood Design, then developed a specific site design based on the master plan. A core group of neighbors tenaciously stuck by the project for the seven years it took to make the park a reality. This group represented a larger neighborhood context and included uphill



The history of the site as a creek and streetcar corridor is marked by curving bench walls and hard edges that separate the maintained and wild planting areas.

neighbors who had professional and activist experience in “working the city.” Throughout the slow process from idea to implementation, the collaboration of community members, city agencies, non-profit organizations, university affiliates and Hood Design provided the requisite energy to see the project through to completion.

While the participatory design process was a strong basis for enhancing community, perhaps more crucial was how this process led to a particular physical manifestation of street and park. Long after the ribbon-cutting ceremony, a park has to perform its role as a community space. What follows is an analysis of the physical features of the park: contextual considerations, program elements reflecting community use and details that reinforce community expression.

DESIGNING WITHIN CONTEXT: TOPOGRAPHY AND STREET

Before the area was developed, Courtland Creek would have been the low point between two hills on its course to San Francisco Bay. With urbanization, the imposition of the street grid required manipulating the topography into a series of slopes and flattened spaces. Courtland Avenue cuts across a hill that once sloped down to the creek. Spanning from linear street to an undercut creek, Courtland Creek Park has to address two very different contextual conditions. Along the five-block length of park, the south side of the street is lined with modest homes slightly elevat-

ed from the street. On the north side, new curbs and gutters create a clean edge where gravel once merged street and right-of-way. Topographic slack is taken up in the old right-of-way, producing some interesting conditions that the park's design exploits for maximum effect. Where the park is level with the street, it expands the street's visual plane, especially where the creek opens up views of vegetation on the far bank. Steps down to the creek invite a whole new experience of a riparian corridor visually removed from the street. At other level sections of the park, where the creek has been culverted and the right-of-way provides access to homes, the site is paved to support neighborhood functions such as parking and children's play. In another section, a change in grade requires that one part of the park be separated from the street by a ten-foot retaining wall. Here, a longtime resident continues to plant his vegetable garden, and his collard greens and corn, always beautiful, are now legitimized as a public amenity.

A PROGRAM REFLECTING COMMUNITY

Even before the park was built, the right-of-way had a life of its own that reflected community use patterns. It was important that the proposed design not remove existing uses but enhance them. To do so required that Hood Design reinterpret activities ranging from the illegal to the simply inappropriate—drug dealing to car repair—into acceptable forms. For example, rather than ignore the fact that youth hang out in the park, several spaces were created that identify the site as a suitable place to meet. One prominent corner is marked by a folly that not only provides interpretation of the site's history via maps incised on its columns, but also celebrates the corner as a social space.

The linearity of the park and its function as a corridor for circulation inspired the creation of a promenade along the street edge. Instead of a typical sidewalk, an *allée* of purple-leaf plums on a decomposed granite path forms the boundary. From this spine, various park functions are organized into bands. Children's activities are interspersed along the corridor, which includes hard-paved surfaces for ball games, a peewee basketball court and a sand yard. In three areas where the park extends to the creek, lawns provide space for field games, dog play and neighborhood parties. At the east, where Court-

land Avenue dead-ends to make room for a wider creek corridor and the right-of-way, the park becomes a piece of urban wilderness, a bit scary but wonderfully adventuresome. Though restoration purists would like to do away with all the non-native species, wholesale removal has been avoided in order to retain the wild sense of the space.

ADVOCACY DETAILING

Given a modest budget, the designer's challenge was for each intervention to have maximum effect. With a palette of concrete (for walls and seats), plants and donated decomposed granite, the design uses juxtaposition, allusion and multifunctional elements to reinforce site and program. The resulting design illuminates anew the landscape and reveals its environmental and social history. For example, the *allée* of purple-leaf plum trees, a circle of redwoods and other formal geometries in the planting plan contrast with the creek's vegetation and the eclecticism of neighbors' yards. This juxtaposition is reinforced by a one-foot concrete path marking the edge between the riparian corridor and lawn. The promenade expresses the park's presence through its dense planting (fifteen feet on center rather than the standard of thirty to fifty feet) and by plant selection that changes with the seasons from bare trees to pale pink clouds of blossoms to red-leaf massing. Hybrid site objects—retaining walls that allow for garden terraces, seat walls that allude to the creek's meander, planting edges that serve as narrow paths—support activities while also providing design cohesion. Bollards placed to discourage dumping and parking in some of the areas also act as seats, conveniently located on corners where people are accustomed to meet. The history of the site as a creek and streetcar corridor is marked by curving bench walls and hard edges that separate the maintained and wild planting areas.

Courtland Creek Park—whose success will be measured by its continued adaptability and use—decisively illustrates how an underutilized public space can become a community resource. It also demonstrates that the medium of landscape can illuminate environmental and social context. Through the design process the park has greatly expanded its potential: responding to existing environmental and social conditions, the design expresses the unique characteristics of the community. ●



Healthy Cities!

Steps Toward Community

Larry Dodge

FARGO

Forty years ago, I left my home town, a small grid city of about 40,000 occupying six square miles, with a bustling downtown bounded by the Northern Pacific and Great Northern Railroads. It's the place Duke Ellington made his great recording, "Fargo, ND, November 7, 1940." Today it is a sprawling, formless suburban town about twice the population and six times the land area I knew, with a dead, depressed, deteriorating center. No evil empire could have destroyed the civic community life more successfully than was achieved here.

*"If a frog is dropped into a saucepan of very hot water, it will desperately try to hop out. But place a frog in tepid water and then very very gradually raise the temperature ... the frog will swim around happily ... adjusting to the increasingly dangerous conditions. In fact, just before the end, just before the frog begins to cook ... when the water is exceedingly hot ... the frog relaxes and a state of euphoria sets in."*¹ Maybe that's what happened in Fargo.



ROME

Fifteen years after leaving Fargo, I lived and worked for two years in central Rome, still a beautiful, functional and environmental model of cities of the past, a model we have abandoned, without a replacement, over the last century. There, I experienced the most phenomenal street life on earth. I was told that all businesses except UPIM, the largest department store, were owner-operated. A cohesive culture certainly helped to create that street life. But I also believe that the street life helped create and sustain the culture.

SAN FRANCISCO

For most of the past twenty-five years, I have lived in San Francisco, whose pattern of neighborhood commercial districts, each serving an area of roughly a half square mile, is the basis for its ongoing magic. The typical pattern of through streets parallel and adjacent to slow neighborhood commercial streets distinguishes SF neighborhoods from those of Oakland and Berkeley, whose commercial streets are clogged with through traffic.

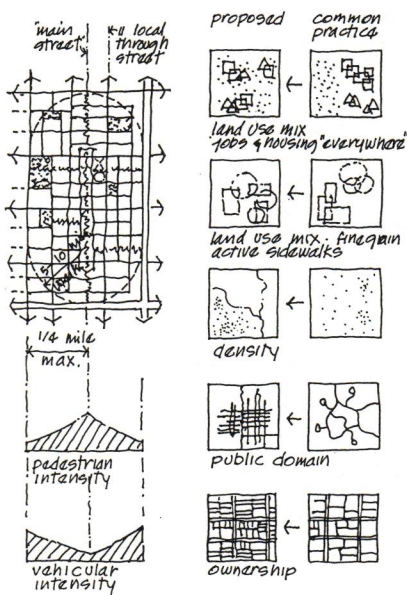
LOOKING OUTWARD FROM URBAN DESIGN

I have been an urban designer over the past twenty-five years. I'm convinced I am an amateur, as I increasingly believe nearly all of us are amateurs—professional architects, engineers, economists, planners and urban designers—too busy and too narrowly focused to realize the impact of our work on the whole of complex urban life. Each of us tries to do good and responsible work on individual projects, only to see the aggregate results produce the ugliest and most damaging urban development imaginable. Focusing on our immediate projects, we disregard the larger world we leave to our heirs, a fragmented world in which ever-increasing population and per-capita consumption bump up against global limits.

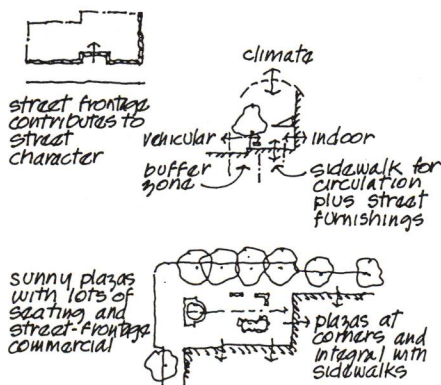
While we can protect wetlands or create more pleasant, economically-stratified small towns, it is only in Healthy Cities that we can experience the breadth of our increasingly plural culture, feel what we have in common, and, perhaps most importantly, develop the broad cultural intelligence to respond productively to our deteriorating social and environmental state.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

With a size of 130 to 320 acres, Pedestrian Precincts allow pedestrian and local transit access on a fine-grained street grid. Streets and neighborhoods are varied in character, with a broad range of house types. Significant small parcel development promotes home ownership and resident investment in business property. A majority of the city's jobs occurs in these Precincts. Concentration of community services near the center of the Precinct, along a pedestrian-dominant, sunny Main Street, provides a high intensity of social connections; a parallel and adjacent local through-street accommodates service, auto-oriented businesses, parking access and bus and light rail routes.



Streets are the primary images of a city and, with plazas and small parks, should be coherent urban spaces, formed by the buildings defining their edges. In addition to accommodating complementary pedestrian and vehicular circulation, these posi-



PRINCIPLES OF HEALTHY CITIES

In her study of the nature of vibrant social and economic urban life, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs notes that cities are not small towns grown large. The planning principles of small towns assume that residents know their neighbors, while cities are, by definition, full of strangers, even at one's doorstep. The bedrock attribute of a successful city district is that a person feel safe and secure among these strangers. Accordingly, safe streets require eyes on the street and generally continuous sidewalk use. Other necessary conditions for the successful city identified by Jacobs include: a fine-grained mix of primary uses, small blocks, aged buildings (for economic variety) and density. She views cities as hives of trade and innovation, ever changing in response to their context. She describes the complex systems-planning appropriate to ongoing growth and change. In this and subsequent books, she describes the economic relationships between cities and their rural, national and global contexts. The picture is one of cities as bustling organic entities with enough energy and intelligence to offer residents full and rich lives while responding capably and collectively to our economic, social and environmental contexts.²

The cities described by Jacobs and the examples provided by beautiful cities of the past, such as Rome, can lead toward a new model of Healthy Cities that are singularly suited to realize complex community, including support and encouragement of:

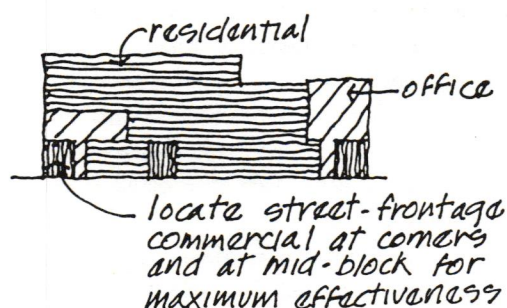
- broad individual experience and the opportunity to live as one chooses, to participate in the local economy and to help create the physical environment;
- complex webs of community among an increasingly plural population;
- greater cultural awareness and aggregate intelligence; and
- growth of a more restorative economy and a more sustainable culture.

Three principles quantify Jacobs's observations and establish Pedestrian Precincts as the basic units that describe the general texture of Healthy Cities:

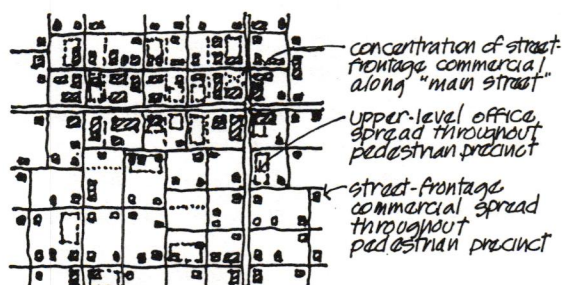
- community services are dispersed throughout the city, within the limits of their catchment population requirements, and are

tive urban spaces should be simple and visually dominant enough to accommodate substantial variation in individual building design, hard and soft landscaping and street furnishings.³

Active sidewalk life requires a delicate mix of land uses. 80-90% of the total building area of a Pedestrian Precinct is likely to be residential, 5-15% office and only about 5% commercial and community uses that contribute directly to safe and active street life. Assuming three- and four-story average building heights, commercial and community uses will form up to 20% of the total street frontage. Businesses which are open at night, increase sidewalk activity and keep eyes on the street—restaurants, cafes, bars, convenience stores, video stores, health clubs, galleries, self-service laundries, bookstores and the like—are best located at corners and at mid-block, offering pedestrian safe-havens every 150 feet or so. Office and residential lobbies should be at street level. The floors of residential units should be high enough above sidewalk level for residents to feel comfortable keeping their windows open to the street.



Residential and office uses occurring above street level should be mixed in a manner that will encourage continuous sidewalk use. Residential square footage will be about ten times that of office space, so it is beneficial to spread office uses throughout primarily residential areas in a pattern with a maximum of about three blocks between office buildings.



located to maximize eyes on the street;

- density is sufficient to activate the sidewalks, but high densities are limited to assure small-scale development opportunities and variety in housing types; and
- office and residential uses are mixed to encourage continuous sidewalk use day and night.

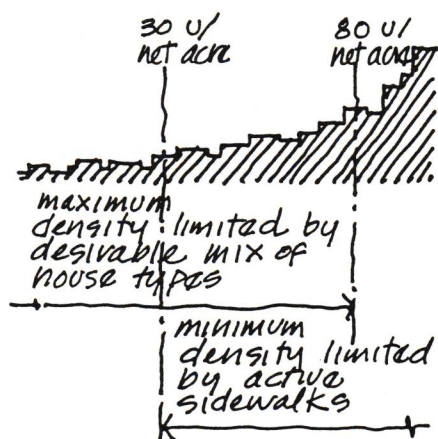
Pedestrian Precincts do for cities what Pedestrian Pockets do for suburbia: encourage the design of particular places with a fine-grained land use mix, an active and healthy public domain where pedestrian and transit circulation are used for a majority of daily trips, a revived sense of community and more sustainable living.⁴ With a population between 8,000 and 20,000, an average residential density of at least thirty units per net acre and an equivalent concentration of other community facilities, including most employment, Pedestrian Precincts support the full range of services necessary to affordable, dignified living—jobs, schools, health care, shopping, entertainment, recreation and civic and religious activities—all within walking distance of every resident.

Planning our cities over the coming decades will be, in large measure, a systems problem of understanding the full consequences of any development on the balance of the community, insuring that each step leads to more sustainable and humane life and communicating these views, clearly and simply, to city residents and their representatives. By allowing evaluation of the aggregate built environment at a manageable scale, Pedestrian Precincts may become the most useful governmental entities for the evolution of Healthy Cities.

COMMUNITY: LARGER LIFE, JUSTICE AND A RESTORATIVE ECONOMY

"When it is said that we are too much occupied with the means of living to live, I answer that the chief worth of civilization is just that it makes the means of living more complex; that it calls for great and combined intellectual efforts, instead of simple, uncoordinated ones, in order that the crowd may be fed and clothed and housed and moved from place to place. Because more complex and intense intellectual efforts mean a fuller and richer life. They mean more life."—Oliver Wendell Holmes, from the prologue to *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

The higher the intensity of development, the better the opportunities for active street life. Thirty residential units per net acre (net floor area ratio (FAR) of 0.6, with a resident population of 8,000 per square mile) is about the minimum density that can support active sidewalk use; it is close to the density of Berkeley. Eighty units per net acre (net FAR of 1.4 with a resident population of 24,000 per square mile) is the approximate maximum density to allow significant individual choice of housing types. Some San Francisco neighborhoods have densities up to seventy units per net acre, comprised of a mix of duplexes, flats, three-story apartments over structured parking and some mid-rise apartments.



Healthy City Fabric results from meshing Pedestrian Precincts with citywide circulation systems and a spread of anchor uses. This is the general land use pattern of Siena, central Rome and Paris, and it would be the pattern of San Francisco if the existing downtown were spread among its 41 neighborhood commercial areas. Conversely, introducing large quantities of housing into our existing downtowns would provide new life around the clock and would offer a welcome addition to our choices of where and how we wish to live.

City arterial streets on a grid of approximately one to one-and-a-half miles are sufficient to distribute traffic evenly and to abut Pedestrian Precincts. Citywide transit systems with one or more transit stops at each Pedestrian Precinct allow for cross-platform transfer with local transit systems. The resulting circulation system allows for differentiation and coordination of local and citywide forms of transport.

Anchor uses are those with a citywide catchment population, heavy traffic requirements and special physical planning requirements—a university, business park, symphony hall, hospital, conference center, major hotel or sports facility, historic district or large-scale natural feature. Anchor uses are typically the “jewels” of the city, generating high levels of urban

The life of a greater whole can be felt in closely knit groups of all kinds—a relationship between two people, small enthusiastic businesses, jazz groups, political activist groups, sports teams, church congregations—any group in which openness, enthusiasm and common cause exist among its members. Such groups exhibit intelligence, artistic expression, awareness, strength of purpose and power beyond that of their individual members. The individual genius pales by comparison with, for example, the everyday crafts culture that supported Borromini and produced the windows, storm sewer covers, paving patterns and stone and plaster work that grace Baroque Rome’s streets. The instincts, senses and vulnerability that allow each of us to connect enthusiastically to various forms of larger community can be among the most powerful of life’s forces and can change our perceptions of who we are.

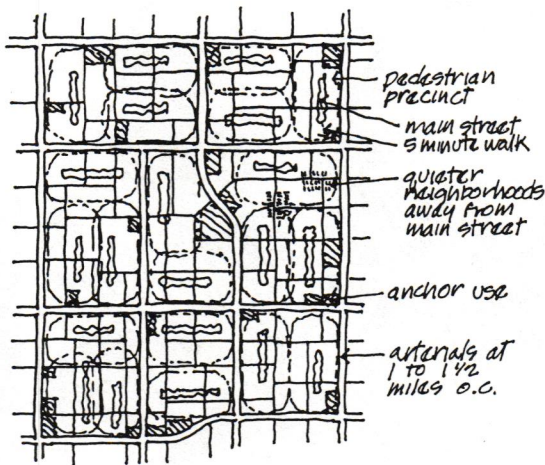
In *The Republic*, Plato describes a concept of ideal democratic life in which culture is the result of a just and civil society. In a civil society, each person acknowledges the differences among all citizens and supports concepts of justice. In a just society, each individual’s distinct aptitudes and capabilities are reflected in their unique associations and connections, creating a dense web of overlapping community networks.

As an integral part of a just society, a restorative economy can be a facet of whole life—the response of complex community to growing environmental deterioration.⁵ Our unique capacity to dominate and manipulate other forms of life leaves the environmental balance necessary for civilization’s survival wholly in human hands. Sustainable civilization and its relationship with the environment may be compared to an acrobat on a high wire, maintaining balance while moving from one position of instability to another. Like the acrobat, sustainable culture would be fully alive and attentive to the moment, capable of immediately sensing and communicating imbalances to other parts of the system and responding in its own best interest. Unlike the acrobat, however, the civilization could not muster all necessary knowledge in advance, and so would often have to learn as it acts, through incremental, direct experience.⁶

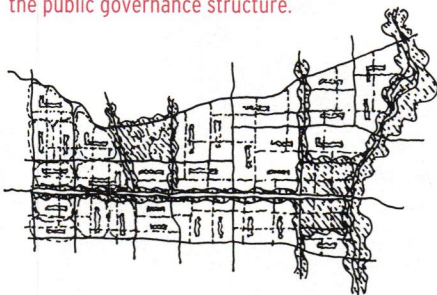
Cities, with their potential to support complex community and larger cultural life, offer us—

activity. They should be spread throughout the city, be directly accessible from city through-streets and be near both transit nodes and the Pedestrian Precinct's Main Street. Each anchor use is capable of stimulating neighborhood economic, cultural and social life and can strongly influence local design character.

(In San Francisco's Civic Center, anchor uses—city hall, opera house, symphony hall, central library, state office building, museum and convention center—are concentrated, rather than dispersed throughout the city, diminishing the potential for economic and social synergy. Paris, in contrast, has spread its cultural anchors throughout its *arrondissements* to maximize the economic and cultural impact of these special uses.)



Healthy Cities may be viewed as organic wholes with a variety of physical forms, living in an ongoing balancing act with their particular context. In Healthy Cities, each constituent part contributes to the health of a larger whole: the building contributes to the street, the street to the neighborhood, the neighborhood to the Precinct, the Precinct to the city and the city to its regional and global context. Conversely, concepts of justice, community and whole life imply opportunities for individual expression in the physical environment, leading to the need for each whole to encourage variety among its constituent parts, with each level of organization represented in the public governance structure.



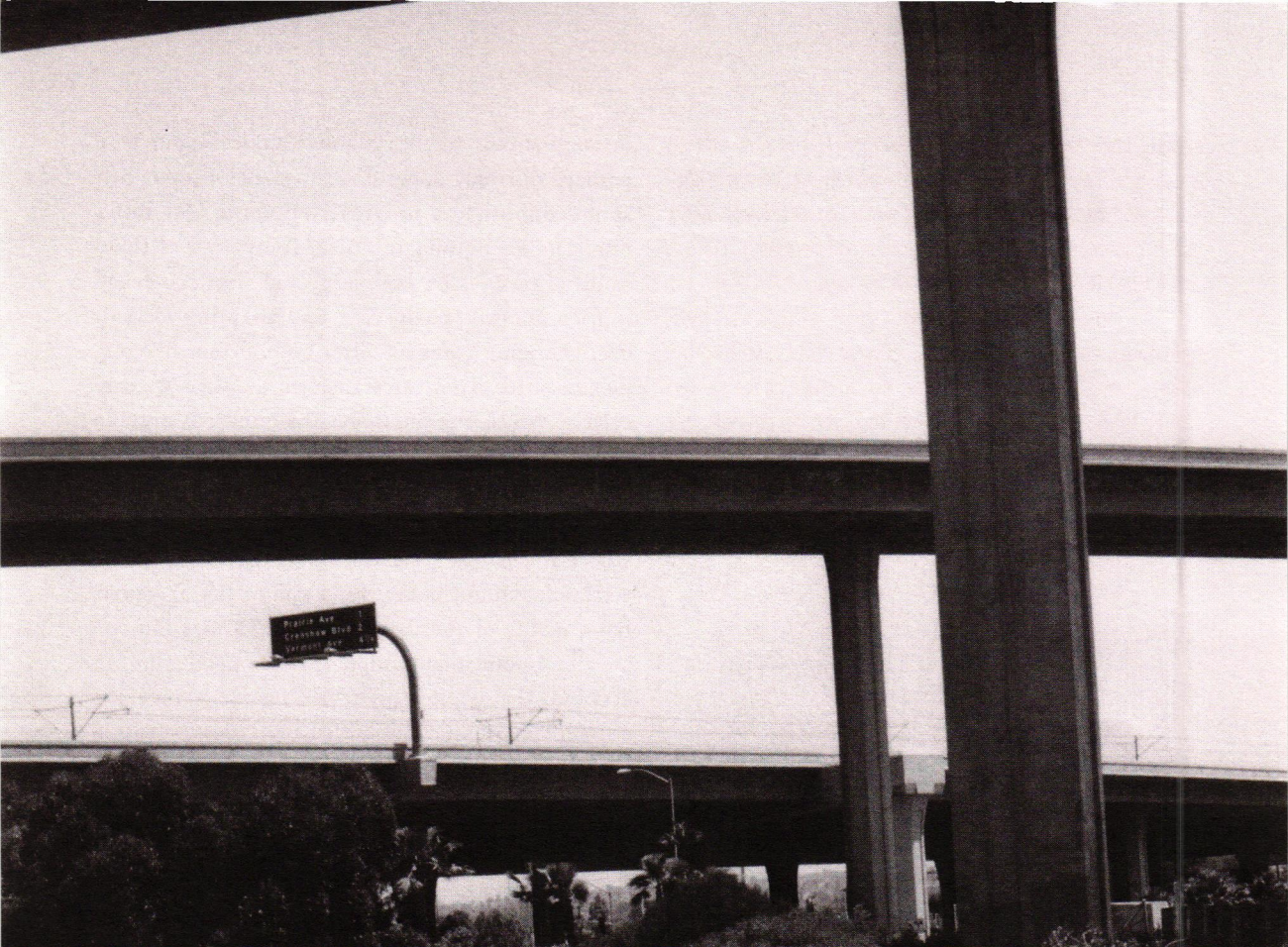
through strong, public, guardian values⁷—our best, perhaps our only opportunity to transform our present economy to a progressively more restorative one. The economies of cities, comprised of thousands of businesses, both large and small, cooperating, competing, coalescing and adapting to their ever-changing contexts, offer an enormously complex resource. They can transform the ways we conceive, produce, use and reuse the hundreds of thousands of products and services we have come to expect in everyday life. They can provide a business setting where “doing good is like falling off a log, where the natural, everyday acts of work and life accumulate into a better world as a matter of course, not a matter of conscious altruism.”⁸ Cities can create an economy that is supportive of ongoing life, an economy that is more particular, just, civil, intricate, comprehensive and diversified than today’s, with a broader range of people involved, more kinds of work and more locally generated control and wealth.

Cities have been the spawning ground for the development of economic life and broad culture throughout the history of our civilization. They contain the seeds of their own regeneration. Large cities supportive of justice and civility, with their potential for greater intelligence and community, offer us our best opportunity to respond to the growing pressures of population growth, a plural society and a deteriorating environment. While present efforts on behalf of our natural environment are important, the growing crisis we face is in large part due to our isolation and ignorance: a crisis of community.

For a more humane and sustainable civilization, we first need Healthy Cities. ●

Notes:

- 1 Charles Correa, Hon. FAIA, *The New Landscape* (London: Mimar, 1989), p. 83.
- 2 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (NY: Vintage Books, 1961), *The Economy of Cities* (NY: Vintage Books, 1970), *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (NY: Vintage Books, 1985) and *Systems of Survival* (NY: Vintage Books, 1992).
- 3 For elaboration, see Allan B. Jacobs, *Great Streets* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993); William H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (Washington: Conservation Foundation, 1980); Donald Appleyard, *Livable Streets* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981); and Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein, *A Pattern Language* (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977).
- 4 Doug Kelbaugh, FAIA, editor, *The Pedestrian Pocket Book* (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988).
- 5 Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows and Jorgen Randers, *Beyond the Limits* (Post Mills, VT: Chelsea Green, 1992).
- 6 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing, 1972), p. 498.
- 7 Plato, *The Republic*, and Jacobs, *Systems of Survival*.
- 8 Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce* (NY: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 14.



Downtown Los Angeles: Scales of Community

Robert S. Harris, FAIA

As the year began, construction cranes dotted the landscape in Downtown Los Angeles. By midyear, buses, light rail and heavy rail were running extended hours beyond midnight to serve the city center's several entertainment venues as well as multiple shifts of employees. Despite the general perception, Downtown Los Angeles remains the chief generator of jobs, incomes and revenues for the region. Its crime rate is remarkably lower than that of many other parts of the city. Within Downtown are fascinating places and buildings and a large share of the region's primary cultural institutions. Revitalization is needed in very specific locations where promising initiatives are already in process, but, overall, an evolving Downtown requires something more like filling in and filling out, repairing, tuning—indeed, a continuation of the processes of city building and place making.

A strategic plan for Downtown was adopted in 1993 and is being implemented through numerous actions. It lays out how to interrelate Downtown's three main zones, how to provide for continuity and change, how to weave a whole out of parts, how to take catalytic actions and how to establish

physical frameworks. It argues the need for leadership in the private sector, which has occurred in the form of a number of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and a myriad of non-profit entities. The formation of these organizations has been as important in developing cohesive communities as in creating focused attention to immediate locations. Downtown is a cluster of interconnected special districts and neighborhoods. In the future, as now, Downtown will not be able to be summarized in sweeping terms. Instead, it must be understood more as a complex place of mix, of history and beginnings, of change, of the challenges and difficulties of megacity urbanity.

The attraction of an urban center is its range of activities, resources and places. The array is more accessible in older cities with rather small blocks and dense building texture than in newer urban centers where wider streets have been sized more for passing cars than for crossing people. Moreover, older streets that were designed for a better balance of foot and vehicular traffic were furnished to create suitably comfortable environments. After decades of neglect, many cities have taken a



Bunker Hill Steps



Biddie Mason Park

new interest in such urbanity. The streets of Downtown Los Angeles await this attention: within and between the sub-districts there is little continuity of pedestrian accommodation, and the districts seem disconnected from each other.

Still, much has already been done. The Community Redevelopment Agency required all development during the 1970s and 1980s to include not only sidewalk improvements and uses but also impressive inter-district connections. Among the most conspicuous of these are the steps that join Bunker Hill with the urban terrace below at Bertram Goodhue's landmark Central Library and the restoration of the Angel's Flight funicular connecting another side of Bunker Hill to the historic core and to new rail transit. Hill Street has been transformed to better accommodate both buses and pedestrians. Broadway along its historic theater district is being repaved and will soon have new sidewalks and proper street furnishings. Figueroa Street improvements have been initiated and are ongoing. Markers have been put in place to identify landmarks and provide

cultural information about them. In a very large Downtown these improvements to the public realm appear dispersed, but they are evidence of a will to establish a more supportive setting for urban life.

The Downtown Strategic Plan was centered on the understanding that only when a substantial resident population was present could the districts provide the services and amenities, necessities and enrichments, that comprise urbanity. Just 4,000 people currently live in Downtown, but that will soon change, as a number of new housing projects are underway to satisfy the surprisingly high demand. Conversions to lofts on the east side are so popular that vacancies are filled from long waiting lists. Ira Yellin's risk-taking conversion of office space to housing above the Grand Central Market and Million Dollar Theater has generated equally great demand. Now other such projects—several in the historic district are in construction and others are in planning stages—are following under the guidance of developer Tom Gilmore, who expects the downtown residential population to grow to more than 30,000 in the next few years.

At the western edge of Downtown a less urbane, more enclosed housing project is well under construction. It is proving attractive to center-dwellers who continue to aspire to suburban interests. Two other housing projects recently won awards from the AIA/LA Chapter. The Villa Flores, designed by John Mutlow, FAIA, provides additional elderly housing in an area of earlier housing projects on their way to becoming an actual neighborhood—with a park, good services and high access and convenience. A new Downtown Drop-In Homeless Shelter by Michael Lehrer, AIA, (an AIA/CC Honor Award winner, to be featured in the upcoming Design Awards issue of *arcCA*) augments a spate of housing projects in support of the homeless and those working their way back to self-sufficiency.

The excitement in Downtown during the 1980s and 1990s was new office towers. The best of these, such as the Library Tower by Harry Cobb, FAIA, were not only handsome themselves but adventurous in connecting to their sites. They were programmed to include little retail space inside: their very large numbers of employees have been encouraged to use the restaurants and retail services of the adjacent district. Thus these buildings have been catalytic

forces in ways distinct from their internally complete predecessors. Overall, however, office space was overbuilt, and as banks and other corporate entities merged and remerged, Downtown vacancies soared, with an impact on all other sectors. While that flight may now have reversed course, few observers expect Downtown to retake its position as a primary location for new office construction.

Instead, the excitement of the current moment, beyond the new housing, is the creation of extraordinary cultural destinations. By the mid-90s, Goodhue's library had been deftly restored by Hardy Holzman Pfeifer as part of an extensive expansion; Lawrence Halprin's adaptive restoration of the library's original garden covers a large parking facility below. Nearby, Ricardo Legoretta, Hon. FAIA, and Laurie Olin, Hon. AIA, redesigned Pershing Square, which has periods of high use but is yet to be properly managed. (Still, it includes the range of open space choices needed at the core of the city: its winter carnival ice rink has been a great success, drawing people from vast distances; its summer concerts are important to Downtown workers and residents.) Up the hill, next to the Museum of Contemporary Art, by Arata Isozaki, Hon. FAIA, is Hardy Holzman Pfeifer's new Colburn School of Music. A substantial conservatory with residential quarters is also planned for the area. Across from all of that, the Walt and Lillian Disney Hall, by Frank Gehry, FAIA, is finally under construction. Just a full block away, the Cathedral of Los Angeles, by Rafael Moneo, Hon. FAIA, is also in construction.

To the south, Staples Center has opened as the court of the Kings, Lakers and Clippers. Its 18,000-seat arena also provides a setting for major concerts. Parking for these venues is insufficient on site, and many have to park at a distance and walk through Downtown. Owners of the properties along these routes have noticed the action, and numerous development proposals fill the air.

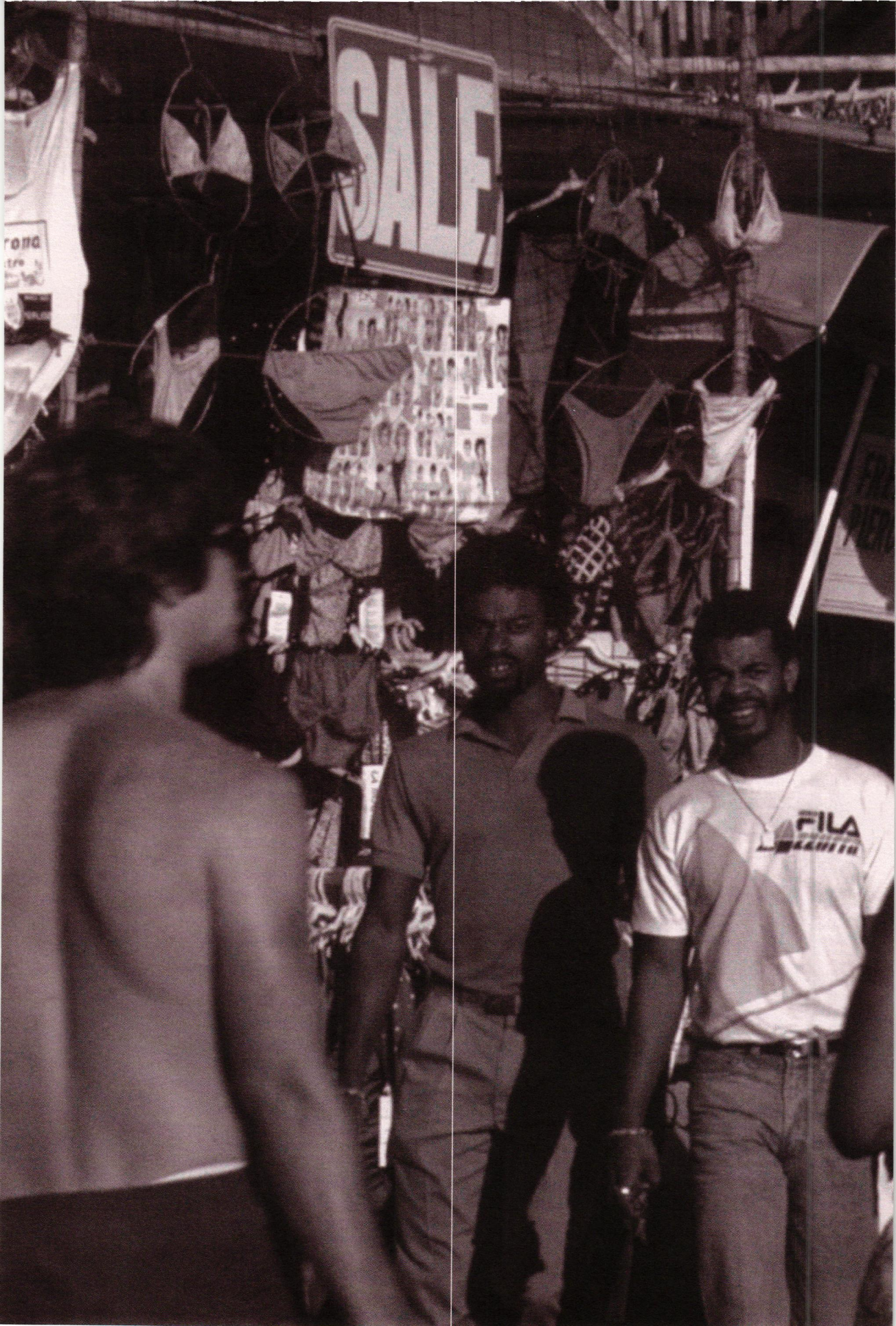
Still further south, at University Park, are important additions. Exposition Park has been given an excellent new master plan whose first increments have been realized in a corner park, interior open space reworking, and the California Science Center designed by Zimmer Gunsul Frasca. Great attention has been given to improving the Coliseum, pending the moment that professional football returns to the

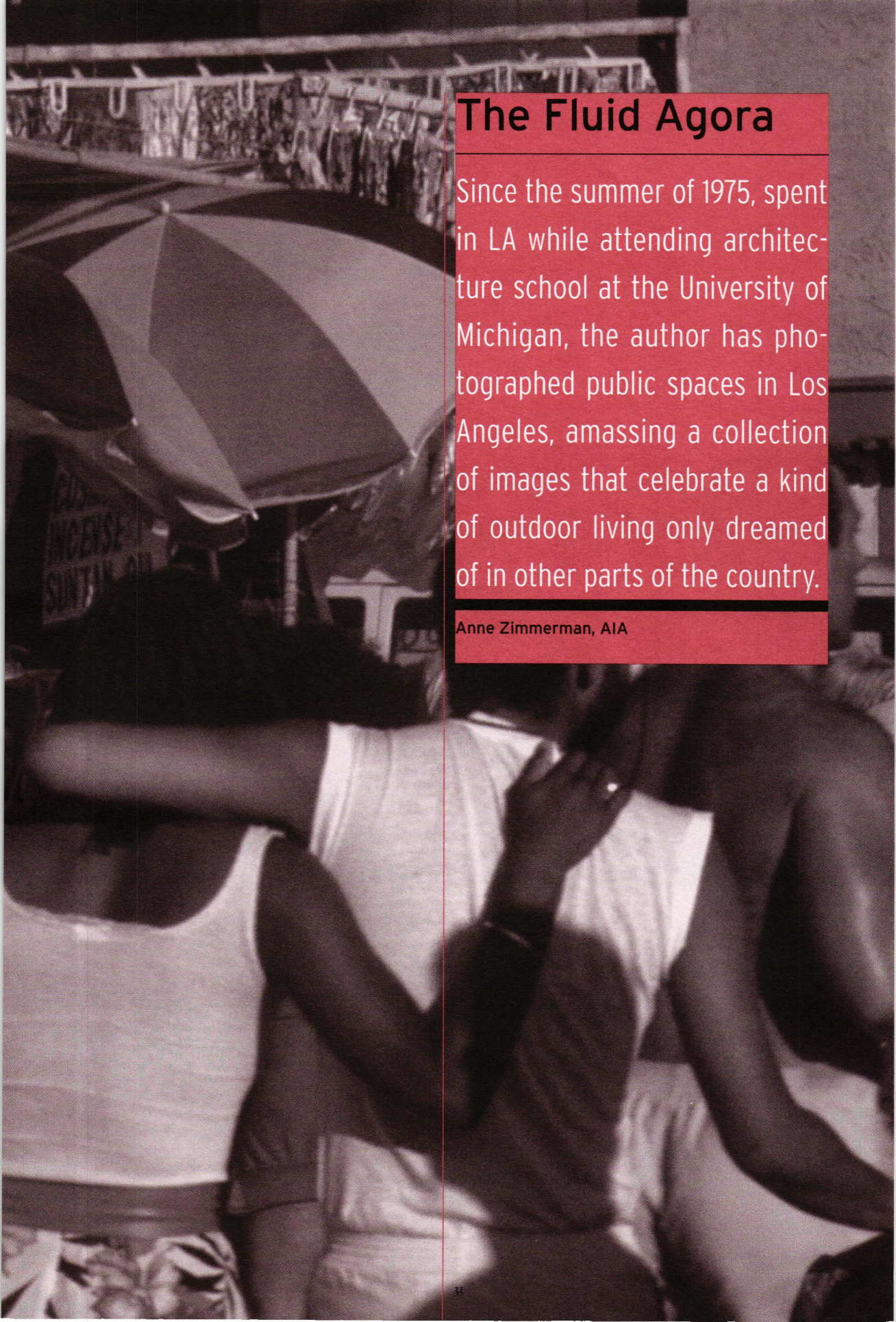
region. In the meantime, it remains a site for major college football, for soccer and for convocations. The University of Southern California has been transforming its campus with a number of new buildings and extensive open-space improvements. USC is now proposing a 12,000-seat events center on Figueroa Street across from the main campus—another site for sports and cultural events.

All of this activity can be placed in a community-oriented framework. The longstanding role of Downtown in support of the downtrodden has continued with the new missions, parks, drop-in and other service centers. The BIDs are developing a business community once again in a position to provide necessary services, to create a habitable public realm and to generate new business activity and jobs. Housing projects are supporting the widest range of needs and interests from the bottom to the top of the economy. And unique destinations are establishing a social mix at the heart of this stretched-out city.

The prospects are encouraging for the future. A new council member for Downtown will soon be sworn in and will inevitably be more interested in the connections between development and community than the current officeholder has been. Disney Hall will become the city signature and encourage surrounding development as well as regional pride. A significant plan for the civic center called "The Ten Minute Diamond" is timely, as a number of new government projects are at advanced stages of planning. Those involved in the planning identify 28 projects going forward in or next to the civic center. Each has a community it serves, and, together, the widest range of communities will have centers of interest that support Downtown.

Throughout its history we have seen comparable periods of intensive development in Los Angeles. Thus we know that such rapid infusions of energy do not by themselves create wonderful urban places. But at this moment more positive expectations may be in order. Architects like Gehry and Moneo, HHP and ZGF, and Mutlow and Lehrer care about urban place and urbanity, not just about object-minded projects. If architects working in all of our downtowns can rise to this level, we will not once again be left with the bard's sound and fury of disconnected, self-serving projects. Instead, we will create truly evocative settings for our diverse communities. ●





The Fluid Agora

Since the summer of 1975, spent in LA while attending architecture school at the University of Michigan, the author has photographed public spaces in Los Angeles, amassing a collection of images that celebrate a kind of outdoor living only dreamed of in other parts of the country.

Anne Zimmerman, AIA

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Previous spread—Strolling on oceanfront walk (aka “the Boardwalk”),

Venice Beach; August, 1986

1 Street vending, Los Angeles’ Chinatown; January, 2000

2 Nisei Day Parade, Little Tokyo; October, 1991

3 Dedication of Thai Town; January, 29, 2000

4 Three Card Monty on Broadway, Downtown Los Angeles; January, 2000

5 Santa Monica Farmer’s Market; January, 2000

6 Pro-Choice Demonstration, Rancho Park, West Los Angeles; November, 12, 1989

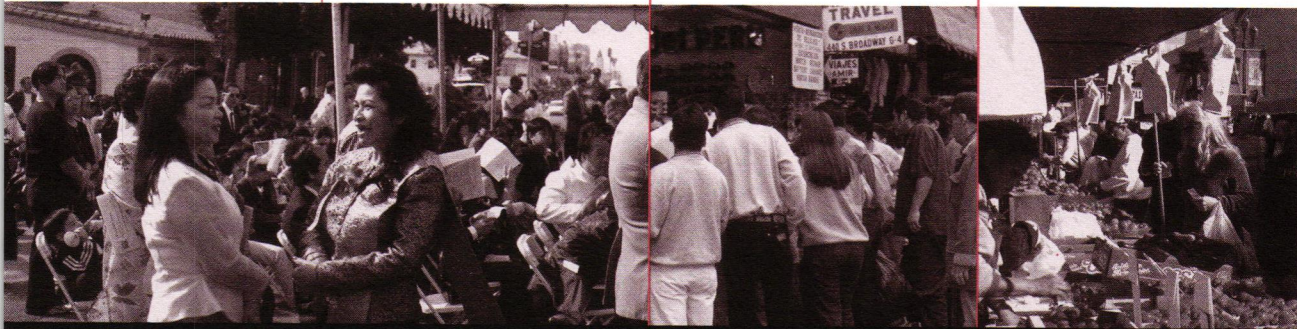
7 Third Street Promenade; Santa Monica, June, 1996

8 Santa Monica Farmer’s Market; January, 2000

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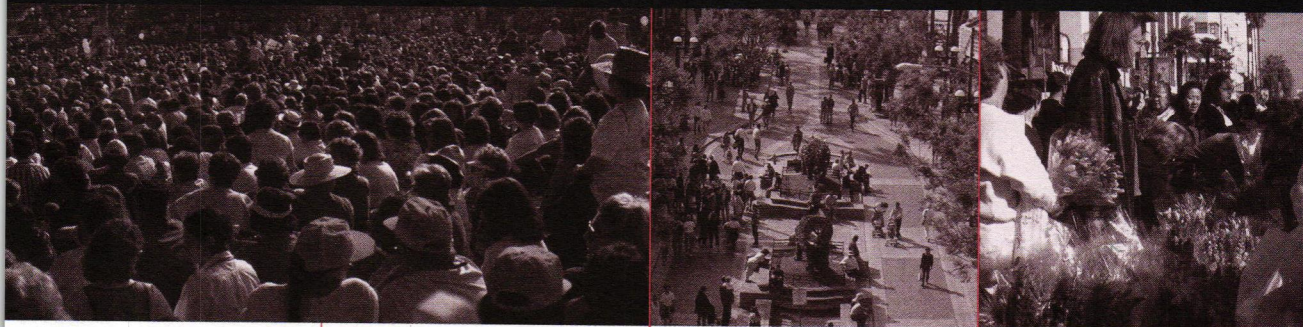


Made up of gathering places for communities of people, the fluid agora includes streets, parks, festivals, markets and demonstrations—venues ever changing in time and location. Much of America has forgotten, or grown fearful of, the life of public spaces. The ethnic communities of Los Angeles (and elsewhere) remind us of the pleasures of the public life.

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Good

Day

at Black Rock: Lessons from Burning Man

Jane Martin

No spectators

Leave no trace

Piss clear

Subvert yourself

It is a town like any other. Lampposts line every street. The city center bustles with public activities. Radio stations and multiple daily newspapers keep its citizenry informed of current events. It has a DPW and a DMV. It has a post office and an airport. It has suburbs.

It is a town unlike any other. There are no elected officials. Its plan is circular. Everyone builds his or her own place to live. There is virtually no crime. There are no businesses or employers. Art is not optional. There are no stores or restaurants; nothing is for sale. There is no television. There are no landlines or cell phones. There are no homeless. There are no guns. It has four Cacophony Societies and an Irrational Geographic Society. It has a Ministry of Statistics. It has grown from 30 to 30,000 people over the last 15 years. Its inhabitants are diverse in age, ethnicity, gender, wealth, sexual orientation and occupation. They are well educated and politically active. They regularly engage each other in meaningful conversation and rituals. There are no taxes. There are no malls. There are no museums.

What began as an individual act on a beach in San Francisco in 1986 has grown to be a festival of

Black Rock City convenes each year at Labor Day. See "www.burningman.com" for information on Black Rock City and the Burning Man Festival.

individual and collective actions with upward of 30,000 participants. Relocated to the desert salt flats of Nevada, the city of Black Rock has grown out of the necessity to accommodate such numbers. In this way, the city has its base in creativity, experimentation, and inclusion. In the coming together around creative expression, this default town has become an operational city: exhilarating, temporary and contagious.

Although there are many levels of meaning to Burning Man ranging from the personal to the communal, the survival and success of this three-day to three-week annual event are based on several principles of behavior that are promoted as mottoes. They become mantras of the playa.

NO SPECTATORS

Black Rock is a city based on participation. From constructing a tent to burning The Man (the annual 40-foot-high effigy in wood, neon and fireworks), individuals and organized groups of volunteers decide what to do. Then they do it. As the festival and town have grown, a seven-member board has formed to manage the project year-round, organizing infrastructure, serving as liaison to the federal Bureau of Land Management and local authorities, disseminating information and selling tickets. Apart from the basic services organizers and volunteers may be providing, such as street lamps, portable toilets, and The Man, citizens must make and do the remainder of what it takes to round out the town. From the Alternative Energy Zone and Kids' District to the post office and art car taxi service, if it's there, someone schemed, concocted and brought it to the playa.

As one participant tells aspiring citizens, "If you build it, you can come." Translated to the scale of a city, this policy of self-reliance promotes volunteerism and neighborliness. Collaboration prevails and creativity is rewarded.

As with the other mottoes of Burning Man, "No Spectators" speaks more about social behavior than physical regulations, but the implications on the built environment are enormous. Out of the vastness of the desert, an urban density is maintained to facilitate interaction. Black Rock is an experiment in inclusionary town planning. With variations from year to year, a circular plan is laid out with vital services and a pedestrian-only civic plaza at its center. Surrounding neighborhoods with support services

are created based on themed districts. There are no set stages or performance areas; events occur spontaneously in any suitable location. In this town teeming with activity, it is impossible to "see everything," but one can "participate in anything," anywhere in town. Such an arrangement encourages movement, curiosity and verbal exchange.

To ensure active participation and basic safety, Black Rock City is effectively a gated community. This gate serves as a defensible border against those not yet educated in its principles (no vending, no guns, etc.) and those unprepared for desert survival. It also choreographs and minimizes the number of vehicles traversing the open playa.

As the population of Black Rock City has grown, spontaneous suburbs have formed for special interests, greater and lesser amounts of noise, proximity to the airport and lower density. These suburbs, however, are conceived of as sub-Burns, smaller villages that maintain the same principles and components as Black Rock, but on a smaller scale. By purposefully keeping a significant density and incorporating outposts of Black Rock's civic components, they maintain a close relationship to the city proper.

By encouraging involvement and promoting responsibility, both socially and physically, Black Rock creates a collaborative, participatory populace. It promotes equality, with favor based on inclusionary creative actions rather than conventional paradigms of social status. Experimentation and improvisation are commended. A great balance exists between the personal ownership involved in conceiving and producing everything from one's house to one's clothing and the collective pride of engaging in the shared experience of enjoying it all. A profound social experiment, Black Rock City exists as a critique of conventional life; it is subversive, progressive and dynamic.

LEAVE NO TRACE

In a place with no "They" (as in "Who will pick up all this trash? They will!"), "Leave No Trace" was initially intended to convey the sentiment that everyone must pack out what he or she packs in. But it expresses, as well, a broader sensitivity to and responsibility for the physical environment.

Black Rock's commitment to the natural state of the playa encourages living lightly on the land as well as incorporating elements of the landscape

into housing, costumes and interactive art installations. Perhaps most memorable have been a life-size copper raining tree, a fifteen-foot diameter ball of ice and the annual three-story earthen towers for operatic performance.

It isn't that Black Rock citizens curb their more material ambitions. One need only recall the massive, communally playable musical monument of sixty pianos or the generator-powered metal shops for onsite manufacture of remote control flame-throwing devices. What differs from most societies is that individual creators adhere to a policy of responsibility beyond the so-called main event. There is a recognition that the event lies not only in the making, experimenting and enjoying, but also in the destruction and removal. The challenge is its own reward.

"Leave No Trace" is a motto widely employed in outdoor recreation of all types, but at Black Rock it sees a level of commitment of heroic proportion. Cleanup volunteers remain until the desert is fully restored to Bureau of Land Management or Burning Man standards—whichever are higher—often staying onsite for weeks after the main festival. A display of collected refuse, neatly packaged according to city block, was recently exhibited in San Francisco, providing perhaps the most complete lost and found service for any event in history.

Furthermore, what began as a simple principle of conduct has grown for many Black Rock citizens to be a major voice in state and federal land use legislation, lobbying for the protection of the Nevada desert. In this way, fiction and reality mutually inform one another. Similarly, once practiced on the playa, "Leave No Trace" returns to citizens' hometowns with them, encouraging scrutiny of land use, relation to the elements and appreciation of place.

PISS CLEAR

Literally taken, "Piss Clear" refers to the empirical method of determining sufficient ingestion of water to defend against dehydration. More broadly, it advocates a monitoring of the body's condition in a harsh environment. In a place where temperatures range from 50 to 110 degrees over the course of an average day and where blinding dust and rainstorms unpredictably invade the landscape, an architecture of survival is in order. At Black Rock, all structures must be portable, provide shade and air circulation, be wind

resistant and temporary. Waterproofing and clothing are optional, creativity and sunscreen are not.

In a town without building regulations or permits, citizens build by trial and error, relying heavily on past experience and collaboration. There is no Department of Building Inspection. If there were, it would surely be something like a Department of Built Exceptions, its only bureaucratic form a published list of the many websites available on the topic of do-it-yourself structures. An atmosphere of pride, ownership and respect prevails.

Reflective of the fact that Black Rock has no hardware or lumber stores, its architectural design is eclectic and its structural design ingenious. A variety of structures populates the landscape, colorful hybrids of PVC pipe, trampolines and parachute cloth. Occasionally, a more traditional Bucky dome, yurt or teepee appears. Decorations range from flags and murals to solar-powered lights and elaborate moving projections. The ever-changing cityscape stands as homage to the spirit of improvisation, collaboration and will power. As a model, Black Rock offers encouragement for invention, self-reliance, collaboration and the dissemination of information.

SUBVERT YOURSELF

Certainly Black Rock City sidesteps many of the difficult issues of more permanent cities. By literally leaving a clean slate for itself, it is constantly able to reinvent and reorganize. It has, however, successfully responded to significant civic challenges: in its unfailing commitment to radical free expression, in its meaningful accommodation of enormous increases in population and in its dealings with the very real demands of health and safety imposed by participants as well as local, state and federal governments. At the very least it is a thriving social and physical experiment that offers a model for extrapolation.

Black Rock City is a place to experiment with ideas communally, to act on imagination and to test personal limits. As when we wake, our dreams unfold and become part of who we are, a stay in Black Rock City renders an interior change of perspective. Its best lessons invite participation, promote appreciation of the environment and encourage an awareness of one's responsibility in society. It prompts us to reflect on the mottoes we inscribe—and build—into our homes, offices, schools and town halls. ●



Birth of a Participant

It's elegant that anywhere would rise and fall in a week, and, some years here, that even happens twice.

Wade Gordon

At night—this is one of my favorite things to do—I walk out into the darkness of the desert, beyond the neon blush of The Man, and turn around to see the spectacle in the middle of nowhere that is Black Rock City. I am amazed.

It is a wonder-carnival of light: banners and flags, domes and towers, illuminated in twisting, tilting beams of laser light and whirly-fire-birds and flickering flames in every color, sprawling out across the flatbed wilderness, a vivid virtuality. And none of it here to make money or careers, to gain security or position. All this wild extravagance, ushered out across mountain ranges and state lines at great financial, emotional and physical expense. Art for Art's sake. It is most heartening. It raises my expectations, rebuilds my belief in human beings, and awakens my appetite for life.

When you sign up to go to Burning Man, the folk deliver you a ticket, a survival guide and a map to a place, both notorious and obscure. In the beginning, people don't usually spend weeks and months preparing for these dispatch proceedings, but then maybe next year they do. It's a passion you grow into. This year was my third. After rampant preparations, it took us about fifteen hours to pack our vehicle like a piñata with nine days of concepts. Leaving San Francisco at 3 a.m., and well behind schedule, we came upon desert Mecca, through nowhere to nowhere, portal by veil by layer, all the



while gravitating toward the arbitrary totem of The Man. It is a bit of *Paradise Lost* in reverse, as one arrives at The Capricious Zen Garden where, as the creatures steadily take their places, boundaries will become tighter and tighter, and the openings obscenely wide. Even my thumbs will crack open from alkali exposure. Maybe the lotus will emerge.

The wild wind that tore down our shade arbor about twenty minutes after we raised it (never mind that we seriously needed shelter from the blistering sun) has whipped itself into a massive white-out; and so whatever landmarks of Black Rock City had begun to rise, that's all a lot gone now too. It's elegant that anywhere would rise and fall in a week, and, some years here, that even happens twice. Thank you, storm. We have no shelter, other than our vehicle, for two full days.

When we finally do have our lanai in place (a rather special place, I must say), I scare myself and make like Dr. Jekyll-Sitting Bull-Jetson, entertaining the locals as they come hither. Personal alchemy is predictable, as my profession here is simply my presence. I am nothing beyond who I am here and now: phase one of deliverance and release. Then there are many shifts of reference; and if I tend to forget or ignore the familiar in my other life—well, this town is very fresh every day. For one week only. We are attentive and visceral; alchemical and anarchistic ... and this anarchy is something beyond the obvious: people are thinking and acting, there is heavenly exchange and activity. There is emancipation. You see the tiny town of Gerlach in the distance, the occasional sheriff's car bumps by: just the palest scent of judgment or government. Thank heavens there exists a cadre of Burning Man lawyers who protect us, battling every conservative muscle in every self-appointed morality police body this side of Salt Lake City. And my reaction to The Status Quo Reality, which is truly ever a threat, fuels my celebration. I suspect that something about it adds to our collective anticipation of the burning of our Man and our reverie in that beautiful, spectacular hour of consummation.

I figure we are good and ripe for composting a new society. I am so free to be here today. No one else cares either way. But of course we all know that suddenly the lovely arrangement will end; and so there is also freedom from tomorrow, and even from today ... tomorrow. Mere days from now ... all this will be gone. The social economy is largely the moment's lust for life. Our mark can only be solarized upon the playa here and now. This town is a unique ephemeral place, so make of it today ... what you will have for today.

By midweek it is clear to me that this is the Dionysian communion of the cybertribes, the pagan homeland re: Post-Modern Tomorrow. I walk the dusty streets on the arm

of my Vampire Lestat, with the eyes of Hieronymous Bosch. The village energy is tribal. Theater of ritual is a favorite flavor, and the whimsical surplus store settlements are stage sets: all peopled with living revelers in their fantasy roles, all bathed in an aura of the Timeless-Universal, each vignette alive and ingenious. A few nights and days of this ... and my walls crumble. I take up with something akin in the soulful characters around me.

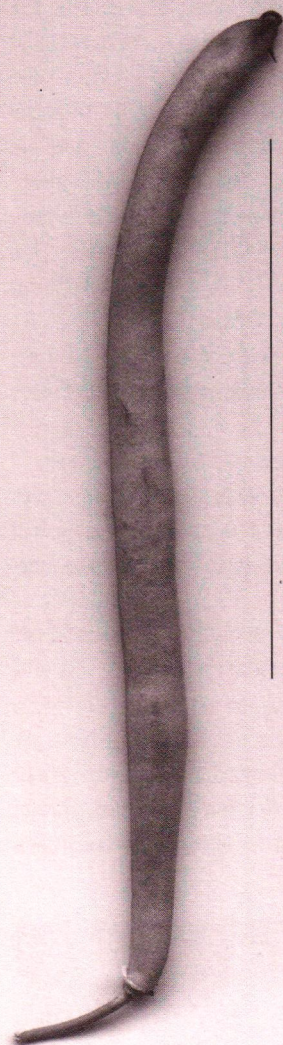
That we experience, in this yeasty, western Alexandria, a profound bonding as a people, should come as no surprise. The Burning Man motto "No Spectators" is really just preaching to the choir, to all but the weekend drop-ins. It takes first-time- and late-comers a day or two to grok the differential consensus required to make this work. But to simply arrive here requires so much self and resource: we here are all already that deeply invested. Only inspired commitment and tenacity can produce more than a pitched tent and a cooler of beer and sirloin steaks floating in what was formerly ice. Looking around, I see our collective madness here is far beyond camping; looking around, I see that those who love their work do it well. One of my neighbors built a playful, interactive shrine to his recently deceased mother. I approve of my neighbor's beauty and I toast it.

Still, the most profound emotions and senses I have of Burning Man are inscrutable to me, and I want to keep them that way. I can't name specific magic; but I know that something charms me here—something that I crave the other 51 weeks of the year. I know I return from the desert an altered version. It's an escapist exercise; the same can be said of Disneyland or Las Vegas, but those adventures do very little to expand my sense of humanity and its immediate potential. And of life. Extreme and exquisite: Burning Man highlights the sensual aspects of living and breathing, the breadth and basic facts of nature, and the very desirable reality of human beings all together—many in body, but for once, for one long week, one in Spirit. ●



Paradise of the Ordinary

From **Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir**
D. J. Waldie



Holy Land is a memoir about the intersection of place and character on the grid of metropolitan Los Angeles in Lakewood. Like the better-known Levittown, Lakewood was built all at once (between 1950 and 1953) as a "planned community."

Holy Land's own grid is composed of 316 numbered segments that range from the ratio of sand and cement in a coat of stucco to the death of the author's father.

9

Before they put a grid over it, and restrained the ground from indifference, any place was as good as any other.

43

This suburb was thrown up on plowed-under bean fields beginning in early 1950. No theorist or urban planner had the experience then to gauge how thirty thousand former GIs and their wives would take to frame and stucco houses on small, rectangular lots next to hog farms and dairies.

In Long Beach, some businessmen assumed the result would be a slum. Others wondered if it would be a ghost town.

Someone asked the eager promoter sent by the developers, "Who will you sell all those houses to – the jack rabbits?"

Had you seen the delicate houses then, going up on the tract's light gray soil, the ground scraped clean and as flat as Kansas, you might have wondered, too.

64

Every block is divided into the common grid of fifty-by-one-hundred-foot lots.

All the houses are about 1,100 square feet.

The houses are on ground so flat that the average grade across the city's nine-and-a-half square miles is less than a foot. Tree roots, bulging into a gutter, pond dark water down half a block.

73

In 1952, a reporter for the local paper interviewed an average resident of the new suburb. He lived on Hayter Street. He had a wife, a son, and a daughter.

He was thirty-two. He earned \$4,400 a year. Including property taxes and insurance, he paid \$70 a month for his three-bedroom house.

He paid \$19 a month on his new television set and \$48 a month for his new furniture.

His wife knew only her next-door neighbors until she joined a sewing club on her block. There she met five more of her neighbors.

He and his wife were registered Democrats, but they had voted that November for Eisenhower.

He said he and his wife were looking for a church, but they didn't know which one.

They wanted to get involved in the community, he said, but they wanted to get the grass growing in their front yard first.

80

My house is largely a void.

The emptiness is not just in the span of the rooms or in the attic and foundation spaces. All the walls are hollow, too.

Houses in Southern California are built as sketchily as possible, while still able to shed rain. Walls are a thin, cement skin over absence. Roofs are important here, but only when it rains. The rest is for modesty.

215

The grid limited our choices, exactly as urban planners said it would. But the limits weren't paralyzing. The design of this suburb compelled a conviviality that people got used to and made into a substitute for choices, including not choosing at all. There are an indefinite number of beginnings and endings on the grid, but you are always somewhere.

221

The students at St. Timothy Lutheran School display their models of California missions in the shopping center. The models of the missions are grouped at one end of a reflecting pool. The pools replaced the landscaped planters down the middle of the shopping mall when it was enclosed and air conditioned in 1978. The students made their models out of cardboard, Styrofoam, plaster, and clay. Some of the models have trees made of twigs and moss. The roofs of the models are painted red, in imitation of the red tile roofs of the original mission buildings. The walls of the models are painted pink or tan to look like stuccoed adobe. The models are labeled with the name of the mission they represent—Santa Barbara, San Fernando, San Juan Capistrano, and San Luis Rey. The labels are a helpful concession, because all the models look much the same—a U-shape of connected one-story rooms, a two-story church partly closing the open end of the courtyard, and a low campanile for the bells. When I was in grade school, nearly every student in the state made a model mission as part of the required California history curriculum. Assembling one of these models, when you were eight or nine years old, made California history seem mostly about building materials.

237

I live on Graywood Avenue. The next street west is Hazelbrook. The first street east is Faculty. These three streets, with about 140 houses, are bounded by Hedda Street and South Street. All of my friends came from within the rectangle of these three blocks that I could reach without crossing at an intersection. From age six to thirteen, I spent part of nearly every day and nearly all summer in the company of my brother and other boys who lived in houses like mine. The character of those seven years is what makes a suburban childhood seem like an entire life.

280

I tell my tenants' oldest daughter stories about my brother and my parents. I tell her about my brother's first electric train set and the mysterious light it made as the train circled in our room on Christmas morning. I tell her about the week in 1953 when it rained with no letup and all the streets flooded. I tell her about the time my brother, not yet four, took all the knobs off the doors in our house. He used a kitchen spoon to take out the screws. I tell her about the time my brother jimmied open the aluminum window screen in his room, jumped out, and wandered away wearing only a diaper. He was two then. Sheriff's deputies found him walking on Clark Avenue in Bellflower, about a mile away. I tell her what my father said, and what my mother did. My tenants' oldest daughter is five. She wants to hear all the stories I have.

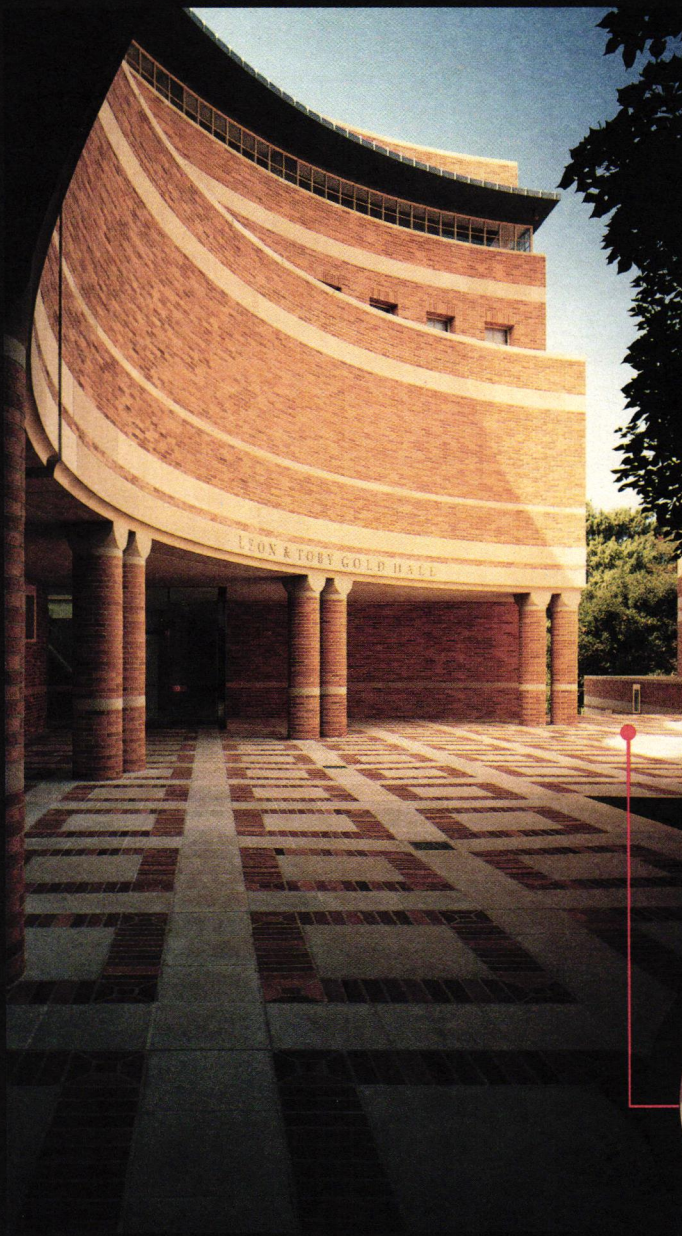
281

It is unlawful to tell the future in my city. One of the oldest ordinances in the city code book, adopted when the city incorporated in 1954, lists the illegal practices by which the future may not be foretold. It is illegal to furnish any information "not otherwise obtainable by the ordinary processes of knowledge by means of any occult psychic power, faculty or force, clairvoyance, clairaudience, cartomancy, psychology, psychometry, phrenology, spirits, seership, prophecy, augury, astrology, palmistry, necromancy, mind-reading, telepathy, or by any other craft, art, science, talisman, charm, potion, magnetism, magnetized substance, gypsy cunning or foresight, crystal gazing, or oriental mysteries."

306

There was very little that distinguished the border Southerners in my neighborhood from my father, who had grown up in Manhattan, or my mother, who had lived on Long Island and worked in New York. There was very little that distinguished any of us living here. We lived in what we were told was a good neighborhood. Our eleven-hundred-square-foot houses were nearly the same. We shopped at the same stores. We watched the same television programs. From September to June, my brother and I wore Catholic grade-school uniforms of dark gray corduroy pants, and light gray short-sleeve shirts. In summer, we wore white cotton T-shirts, denim pants, and high-top tennis shoes. Every boy in my neighborhood did. Our parents were anxious to do what was expected of them, even when the expectation was not altogether clear. ●

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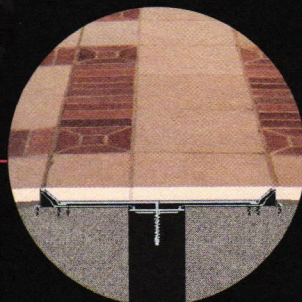


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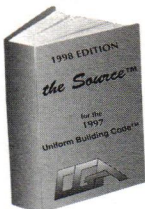
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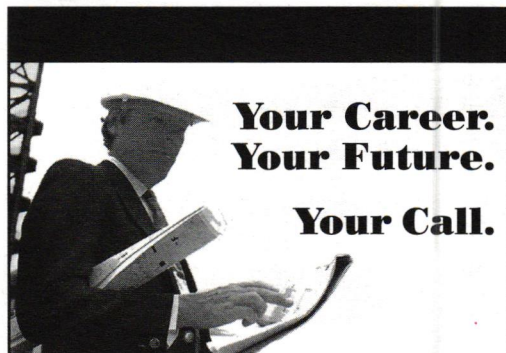
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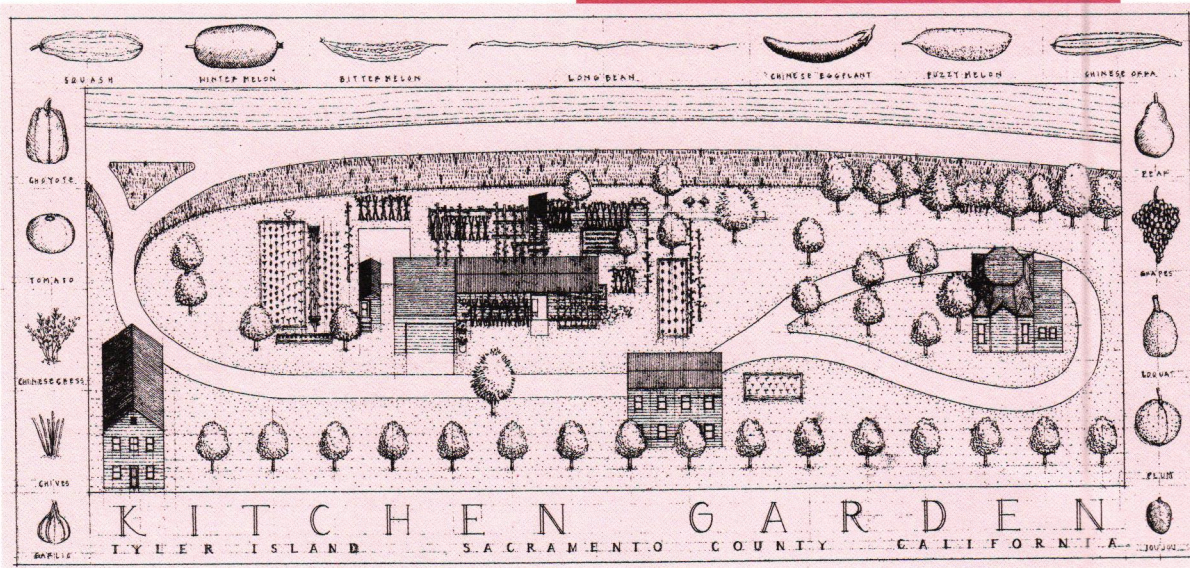
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Coda



Delta Primer

This kitchen garden in the California Delta, where the Great Valley drains into San Francisco Bay, is below sea level. It consists largely of Chinese fruits and vegetables. It is built in the ruins of a farm camp that was once so busy it had a three-wok kitchen.

Each of these facts could be the beginning of a story about one of the most complex and disputed landscapes in California. The Delta is the largest tidal estuary on the West Coast. Reclaimed by American money and Chinese labor, it has become extraordinarily productive farmland; however, because reclamation caused the ground to subside, it requires constant, vigilant, expensive management. Since World War II it has also become the centerpiece of the infrastructure that supplies water to Southern California. It is being transformed again by environmental politics, suburban development and recreational use.

The Delta's future depends on broad-based support for difficult compromises among varied constituencies. The region is critically important to California's economy and ecology, but it is almost unknown in much of the state.

Jane Wolff

This drawing is part of the *Delta Primer*, a project conceived to develop methods and means that designers can use to encourage and frame public debate about contested landscapes. The *Delta Primer* has two aims: to educate broad audiences about the urgent dilemmas facing the Delta and to generate terms for discussion that transcend the usual boundaries of interest groups. Its strategy is to represent concrete documentary stories about the landscape in visual language that most people understand; its premise is that change could and should be informed by the richness and complexity of what already exists. ●

For more information on the *Delta Primer*, write the author at wolff.42@osu.edu.